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The Adventures of an Actress.

"Yes, Hazel," he muttered, "you're worth risking the torments of Hades for."

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A THRILLING INSTALMENT.

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

IX.—Diamond Cut Diamond.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

HORACE CALDECOTT sat before his open bureau in his well-appointed study, the very room into which he had tricked Hazel Harlow when she had first come to London. Before him was a pile of letters and papers. Presently he leant back in his chair and lighting a cigarette, gave himself up to his thoughts.

"What a piece of luck," he began, "to think that old Jacob Dimsdale should be able to help me in my plans, and there's no fear of his going back on me. He knows I've got him in the hollow of my hand. I'll trot down to Birmingham to-night and once there, I ought to be able at last to bring off the *coup* that has already cost me so much. Yes, Hazel," his dark eyes gleamed vindictively, "my time must come sooner or later. You won't always have Mr. Eric Monteith and the luck of the very dickens to keep you from becoming mine."

He put his hand into a pigeon-hole of the desk and drew out a cabinet photograph. It was the head and shoulders of a girl, a girl with the face of an angel, with a great aureole of hair surmounting her broad forehead and wide open eyes. Caldecott ground his teeth together. "Yes, Hazel," he muttered, "you're worth risking the torments of Hades for."

At that moment a slight rustling sound at his back caused him to wheel round in his revolving chair. So engrossed had he been in his own sinister thoughts, and the contemplation of Hazel Harlow's photograph, that he had not heard the study door open, had not seen the stylishly dressed female figure that crept inside the room, had not observed her steal across to his very side. It was only when he could almost feel her breath upon his head that he discovered her presence.

"Valerie!" Caldecott thrust the photograph he had just been gazing at so intently into its hiding place. Then he rose to his feet, and battling with a sudden rage, tried to face his unwelcome visitor calmly.

"Yes, Horace," answered the woman quietly, though her face was pale and there was a look in her eyes that told of suppressed passions behind them. "You didn't expect to see me, Valerie Bellairs, the woman you have tricked and fooled for so long. You have sworn to me over and over again that Hazel Harlow was nothing to you, yet I find you here gloating over her portrait and muttering like a love-sick swain."

Caldecott flushed. For a moment he hesitated, then with a sharp mirthless laugh he broke into quick speech.

"So be it then," he said, "the buttons are off the foils, and we fight with naked blades. If you will have the truth, by Heaven I'll give it you. I am tired of you. Sick to death of your pestering, jealous ways. So it's no good your coming here and sneaking in upon me unawares, and then trying to ride over me roughshod. Go your way, and leave me to go mine."

Valerie staggered back as though she had been struck in the face. For a few moments she remained speechless, while Caldecott confronted her with a sneer on his saturnine countenance.

"So that's how the wind blows, is it?" at last she said in a low voice. "I'm to be cast off like an old glove. It wasn't enough that I gave you all the love there was in me, that I lied and schemed, and did things that were base and mean merely for a caress or a word of endearment from you. I'm to go my own way, am I? Very well. And now hear me. I'll not rest until I have brought you down into the mud, Squire Horace Caldecott. And as for Hazel Harlow, though she proved one too many for me once, I've learnt wisdom since then. I'll strike in the dark, and when she thinks herself most secure. You've had your warning. Beware!"

The actress spoke in a voice fraught with pent-up rage. Resourceful villain as he was Caldecott could not help quailing somewhat before the anger of the woman he had tricked and deluded so long. Her eyes were opened now, and a wild unreasoning passion of love had given place to a dark desire for revenge, the strength of which Caldecott little realised.

"Heroics, my dear Valerie," he said with an attempt at levity, "Why should we desire to cut one another's throats? We, who have been—" he hesitated, and then said meaningly, "such very good friends. I am sure that Valerie Bellairs, with all her talent and all the admirers that she has won for herself upon the stage, will never lack admirers far more worthy of her great reputation than so humble a man as Horace Caldecott. So let us shake hands and at least part as friends."

He held out his hand as he spoke, but the woman drew back. "I don't think you quite understand," she answered, "it's going to be war between us now, war to the knife, for I swear to you that I will not rest until I have dragged you down to cry for pity at my feet. You are powerful, rich, unscrupulous, and I am only a woman, a plaything, to be scorned and thrown aside as soon as I have fulfilled my destiny in becoming your toy."

Look at page 432.

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Without another word she turned and left the room.

A low laugh broke from Caldecott as she disappeared; a sigh of apparent heartfelt relief fell from his lips.

"So ends a chapter in my life," he muttered. Yet in his heart of hearts he knew that the chapter had not yet ended—he knew all the fierce passion that lay latent in Valerie's heart. She was a passionate woman scorned, and he knew that from that moment he would have to be on his guard. "Anyhow," his thoughts ran, "she's not sailing under false colours."

"Its open hostilities between us. I wonder what her first move in the game will be. Ah, well, I'm not afraid of her. I don't think her bite will be anything like as bad as her bark. And now I must get to business. I'll catch the 2.10 to Birmingham from Paddington. I've got plenty of time to get everything ready and be off."

At about a quarter to two the front door of Horace Caldecott's house opened and a man issued forth. He was an elderly gentleman, with almost snow-white hair, grey moustache, and trim-pointed beard streaked with white. He was well-dressed, and carried himself alertly, while his bronzed face betokened the traveller, his upright carriage the old soldier. A private hansom was drawn up alongside the kerb.

"Paddington, James," said the old gentleman. The man touched his cockaded top hat and whipped up his steed, a coal black thoroughbred. The vehicle rolled noiselessly away on its pneumatic tyred wheels.

CHAPTER II.

It was mid-day. New Street, Birmingham's chief thoroughfare, was crowded with shoppers and pedestrians. On a hoarding at the Town Hall end of the street was a large placard, a coloured poster with just a girl's face upon it, and underneath the words, "Hazel Harlow, the famous actress, is at the Theatre Royal." Outside the theatre itself was a crowd of people examining the photographs and playbills displayed by *The Good Samaritan* Company, whose headquarters for that week were at Birmingham. The box-office was crowded, and that despite the fact that at the Prince of Wales's Theatre a London company, with all its original cast, was making a bid for the favour of Birmingham playgoers. *The Good Samaritan* Company had already given two performances in the town, and the papers, especially the *Daily Post*, had been enthusiastic in praise of the beautiful Hazel Harlow. The box-office of the theatre was beseiged. Raymond Venables, the manager, was ecstatic. He stood in the entrance to the theatre with the lessee of the house and gazed jubilantly at the crowds that pressed forward to buy seats for that evening's performance.

"I wonder what they are doing at the Prince of Wales's," he muttered to his companion.

"Precious little. That was a stroke of luck for you, Venables, getting Hazel Harlow," added the other enviously.

"You're right, my boy," replied the manager, "and shall I tell you what I'm going to do when this tour is over? I'm going to get hold of a London theatre and run the Harlow for all I'm worth. Why, she's worth a hundred pounds a week to anyone for her face alone, and more than that, she can act."

In the meanwhile Hazel Harlow and Jenny Lovelace were walking together along Corporation Street.

"So this is Birmingham," Hazel was saying, "the best governed city in the world, eh? Well, it's a fine town, and I think we ought to have a jolly week here. Let's go back to our lodgings, have some lunch, and then go out to the Botanical Gardens at Edgbaston. I hear they are worth seeing, and it really is a lovely day."

To this Jenny agreed, and getting on to an omnibus they were driven up to Broad Street, in a quiet street off which their lodgings were. At the lodgings there was a letter for Jenny.

"I seem to know the handwriting," she said as she looked at the envelope, "but I don't know who it's from."

"Look inside and see," said Hazel laughingly.

The letter was as follows:

"Belle Vue,
"Augustus Road.
"Edgbaston.

"My Dear Jenny,—

"Seeing that your Company is here in Birmingham, and not having seen or heard anything of you for some time, your aunt and I are writing to ask you to come and see us this afternoon. We shall be delighted if you would bring Miss Harlow with you.

"Your affectionate uncle,
"Jacob Dimsdale."

"Well I never!" cried Jenny, handing the note over to her companion to read. "It's from Uncle Jacob. I'd quite forgotten about the old boy. He's my mother's brother," she said explanatorily, "and he owns a big electro-plating business in busy Birmingham. What do you say, Hazel? Shall we give up the Botanical Gardens and go and have tea with Uncle Jacob and Aunt Sarah? They've got a lovely house and garden, and he's as rich as Crœsus."

"I shall be delighted, dear," answered Hazel. "I never knew you had an uncle in Birmingham."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I'd quite forgotten all about him. I haven't seen him for some years. It's rather funny he should write and ask us to go and see him now I come to think of it, for Aunt Sarah is rather puritanical in her ideas. She comes of an old Quaker stock, and I remember that when she heard I was going on the stage she wrote me a long letter all about the terrible dangers and awful wickednesses that I was going to be plunged into. Perhaps Uncle Jacob thinks that he owes me something to make up for his past neglect of his niece's existence. Anyhow, he's quite harmless, and there is no reason why we shouldn't go."

At that moment the landlady appeared.

"A gentleman to see you, ladies," she said, "Mr. Monteith."

"Ask him up," replied the girls simultaneously.

The door opened and Eric was ushered in.

"Good morning," he said cheerfully, "I want you two to come and have lunch with me at Lissiter's. I've heard it's a good place for a feed."

The two girls exchanged glances. Eric noticed their hesitation.

"If you have a previous engagement," he said courteously, "please don't let me interfere with your plans."

His eyes looked hungrily at Hazel's beautiful face. It was plain to see the adoration that was in his heart for the young girl whom he had sworn to befriend and cherish, if not as a lover, at least as a brother.

"Oh, we've not got an engagement," cried Jenny, "at least yet awhile. We've promised to go up to Edgbaston this afternoon to have tea with an uncle of mine. There's no reason why we shouldn't come and have lunch with you, notwithstanding the fact that we've been shopping in town all the morning."

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"I've got a carriage outside," said Eric deprecatingly, "if you will be so kind as to avail yourselves of it."

There was no legitimate reason under the circumstances for refusing so generous an offer. Accordingly the trio were speedily driving off towards Lissiter's.

During lunch Jenny told Eric about the invitation she and Hazel had received for that afternoon. On hearing the news Monteith's face clouded.

"I suppose it's all right," he began doubtfully.

Hazel broke in with a merry laugh.

"I am quite willing to admit, Eric," she said, "that you have every reason to view with suspicion any movement of mine, especially considering the terrible experiences we have gone through together." Her voice grew suddenly grave. "But," she went on, "I don't really see what harm can come to me this time. Mr. Dimsdale is undoubtedly Jenny's uncle. He is an elderly man; he has a wife with religious scruples. Surely there is nothing terrifying in that."

But Eric was not convinced.

"Jenny has just said," he remarked slowly, "that she is at a loss to understand why her uncle has expressed a desire to see her with such cordiality. The last time she was in Birmingham he took no notice of her at all."

"Yes," broke in Jenny, "but that's easy enough to explain. Everyone's heard of Hazel Harlow by this time, and my uncle, despite Aunt Sarah, is only human after all. He wants to get a glimpse of the famous actress, and he wants to be able to see her in private life."

"You may be right," answered Monteith, "yet I beg that you will both be careful. Every new town we come to I get the idea that something is going to happen, and it makes me as nervous as a woman. If only—" he broke off short, but Hazel knew what he would have said and the colour rose to her face. If only she would become his wife. Those were the unspoken words that had hovered on Eric's tongue. Yet love had not yet thrilled Hazel's pulses, not that love at least that a girl must feel in the presence of the man to whom she has given her heart.

CHAPTER III.

Belle Vue, Augustus Road, was a fine red brick mansion, standing back from the road in its own grounds, ringed in with noble trees. At about the same time when Hazel, Jenny, and Eric were discussing their lunch at Lissiter's, two men sat at meat together in Jacob Dimsdale's house. The one was Jacob Dimsdale himself, a somewhat portly man, the hair on whose temples was thin and grey, whose forehead was furrowed with deep lines, with small, rather crafty eyes resembling a ferret's. The other was he whom we had last seen issuing from Horace Caldecott's town house, the mysterious stranger with the grey beard and white hair.

Dimsdale took out his cigar-case and proffered it to his guest.

"You can smoke here," he said somewhat nervously, as Sarah's confined to her room. "As a rule she doesn't like smoking in the dining-room."

The other laughed.

"Petticoat government, eh, Dimsdale?" he said.

Then he went on. "Now let's get to business. There's got to be no misunderstanding between us. Either you play your cards as I tell you or I blow the gaff about what happened twenty years ago, when Jacob Dimsdale started to build up a big fortune after as deliberate a crime as anyone was ever guilty of."

Dimsdale's face was ashen.

"For goodness sake, Caldecott," he said, "don't speak so loud."

"And for goodness sake," broke in the other roughly, "drop that Caldecott. Remember my name's Antrobus. Colonel Charles Allister Antrobus. Please to remember that."

"Yes, yes," answered the other, "I won't make the mistake again. And I'll do anything you like if you will only swear to keep locked up in your own breast what you and you alone, beside myself, in all the world know."

Caldecott smiled. "I little thought, friend Jacob," he said callously, "that I should ever be constrained to put the screw on you. But it's a strange world this, and you never know what's going to turn up next. To think that the simple little fact of your being uncle to Miss Jenny Lovelace should have necessitated my flying down to Edgbaston and asking your help."

Jacob Dimsdale writhed. He was as clay in this man's hands, and he knew it. For twenty years he had gone on steadily amassing wealth which owed its foundation to an act the true story of which Horace Caldecott alone knew. Twenty years is a long time, yet it was not time enough for the memory of that act of criminality to disappear from Jacob Dimsdale's life. And now Caldecott, the one man above all others whom he never desired to see again in this world, had risen up to confront him with the black story, nay, more, had put as the price of his silence the consummation of yet another deed of villainy.

"What is it you want to do?" asked Dimsdale hoarsely. "I have asked Jenny and Miss Harlow here this afternoon according to your instructions. Have you evil designs upon my dead sister's daughter?"

"You can assure yourself on that point," broke in Caldecott, "my business does not lie with your niece. It is with her comrade. But you need know nothing about that. All you have to do is to keep your mouth shut and your niece out of my way at the same time. And remember if you betray me by the faintest word or gesture I'll not spare you. At your time of life it would be decidedly unpleasant to be forced to visit Portland or Dartmoor."

Jacob Dimsdale shuddered.

"Anything but that," he murmured, "anything but that."

"Good," went on the other. "Then we understand one another perfectly. Your part this afternoon will be an easy one. It will be merely to back me up in everything I say and do most vigorously; to convey to your niece and her companion that I am in every way a desirable and praiseworthy acquaintance. If you do that all will be plain sailing, and the world need never know that Jacob Dimsdale reached his present wealthy position by letting another suffer for his crime."

The last shaft struck home. Dimsdale shuddered and put up his hands with an imploring gesture.

"You need say no more," he muttered hoarsely.

At four o'clock that afternoon Jenny and Hazel, according to arrangement, arrived at Belle Vue to take tea with Uncle Jacob and his wife. They were ushered into a beautifully appointed drawing-room by a tall, stately footman, who informed them that Mrs. Dimsdale was unfortunately indisposed. She sent her love to her niece, and her compliments to Miss Harlow; Mr. Dimsdale would be there in a few minutes. The man retired, and barely had he closed the door behind him

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when it reopened to admit the portly form of Uncle Jacob, followed by the grey-haired, white-bearded, "Colonel Antrobus."

"How do you do my dear niece?" said Dimsdale, kissing Jenny warmly on the cheek. "I'm proud to meet you, Miss Harlow," to Hazel, "all Birmingham is full of your praises. Allow me to introduce my very dear old friend, 'Colonel Antrobus,' late of the Rosshire Buffs, to you."

The pseudo-colonel bowed courteously. So complete was his disguise that all the two girls saw was a well set-up soldierly old gentleman with pleasant manners.

"I am delighted to meet two such charming members of a profession to which the public owes so much." His voice had a silky smoothness about it quite unlike that of the Horace Caldecott that Hazel knew, and had such good reason to fear. She acknowledged the greeting becomingly, and the conversation soon drifted into topics of general interest.

By the time tea was brought in the little company was on the best of terms. Jenny was secretly charmed to find her uncle so cordially disposed, neither did she see any reason to regret the fact that Colonel Antrobus was the substitute for her austere aunt.

Suddenly Antrobus, fixing his eyes on Hazel, said pleasantly:

"I wonder if I could induce you, Dimsdale, to bring your niece and Miss Harlow to visit me at my house. I should like to contribute somewhat to the enlivenment of your stay in Birmingham. What do you say to a little supper party after the theatre? I could drive you out to my house and see that you were sent back quite safely."

Dimsdale turned to his niece. "What do you say, Jenny?" he asked, "would you care to come?"

Jenny looked at Hazel. She saw no reason to refuse, and indeed read acquiescence in Hazel's eyes.

"We shall be charmed," she answered brightly.

"Good," said the Colonel, "then let us say to-morrow night." And so it was arranged. Dimsdale promised to be at the theatre at the close of the next evening's performance and drive with the two girls to his friend's house.

CHAPTER IV.

It was between the first and second act of *The Good Samaritan* on the evening of the same day that had witnessed Jenny and Hazel's visit to Edgbaston. Eric and Hazel were standing at the wings talking together. Hazel was recounting how pleasant an afternoon they had spent and wound up by saying:

"There was an old gentleman there, a Colonel Antrobus, who has very kindly asked us to supper at his house to-morrow night under the chaperonage of Mr. Dimsdale."

"Colonel Antrobus," echoed Eric, "do you know if by any chance he was formerly in the Rosshire Buffs?"

"Yes," answered Hazel, "that was the name of his regiment."

So complete was this disguise that all the two girls saw was a well set up, soldierly, old gentleman.

Look out for "Dead to the World."

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"How strange," replied Monteith. "That was my father's old regiment, and he and Colonel Antrobus were very great friends. He lives in a beautiful house in Edgbaston. Yet it is rather strange that he should ask you to supper with him."

"How strange?" queried Hazel.

"Because he was a man of the most quixotic views. He was a regular austere man. They used to call him the Covenanter in the regiment. He never went inside a theatre in his life, and he always professed to hold the stage and everything in connection with it in the utmost abhorrence."

"He certainly doesn't answer that description now," said Hazel laughing. "He seemed a most sociable old gentleman, and Mr. Dimsdale evidently thinks a lot of him."

"And what sort of a man is Mr. Dimsdale?" went on Monteith.

"I should say rather a self made man, but very kind hearted."

Eric was silent, yet the thought that ran through him was, "Not at all the sort of man that Colonel Antrobus a blue blooded, stiff old martinet, as I knew h m would be likely to cultivate. He must have changed since the old days."

The rise of the curtain cut short any further conversation between the pair, but Eric had determined to inquire more fully into the strange, and to him, absolutely inexplicable change of front made by Colonel Antrobus, late of the Rosshire Buffs.

He was up betimes the next morning, and repairing to the General Post office, obtained a look at the Birmingham directory. Yes, there it was plain enough. "Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Alister Antrobus, D.S.O., G.C.B., Rosshire Lodge, Edgbaston."

Eric noted the address and strolled out into New Street, pondering deeply as he went. Ever since that first day when he had met Hazel Harlow, and had realised that henceforth he could have no other mission in life but to guard her, and to endeavour, if possible, to make her share his destiny and fortune, he had felt that the young girl's life was beset by danger and difficulties of which she herself had but a slight realisation, and how amply had his forebodings been justified? Go where she would danger seemed to dog her footsteps, and her worst enemy was a man whom Monteith knew would leave no stone unturned—and, as events had proved, was absolutely without scruple—to ensnare Hazel into the loathsome net of an all-absorbing passion.

Thus it came about that even when danger seemed farthest away, Eric Monteith was most on his guard. It might be, as Hazel's words had implied, Colonel Antrobus had repented of the austerity that had won him the nickname of The Covenanter in days gone by, and yet—a vision of the grim soldier as Eric remembered to have seen him when a boy, rose up and made the very thought seem preposterous.

"Anyhow," said Monteith to himself, "there is one perfectly simple way of finding out the reason that has caused the Colonel to so suddenly abdicate from the rules of his younger days. I can call on him this afternoon, as my father's son. Then I can satisfy myself that everything is as it should be."

He said nothing of his intentions to Jenny and Hazel, who were both of them looking forward to their evening's dissipation. Hazel in her simple country life had tasted so few of the sweets of civilisation and refinement, that it was quite a novel experience for her to have a supper party to look forward to in a big house where everything must be of the best.

As for Jenny, she had all an actress's love of excitement and jollification. She was Bohemian to the core, and had been agreeably surprised with the change in her uncle's manner towards her. She saw no cloud to dim the horizon of her mental vision.

At three o'clock that afternoon Eric jumped on to a 'bus at the Town Hall and was soon driving up Broad Street towards the Five Ways and the Hagley Road. He had found out the whereabouts of Rosshire Lodge.

At the end of Hagley Road he jumped off the vehicle and walked down a quiet tree-shaded thoroughfare that led to the road where the Colonel lived. Rosshire Lodge he found to be a large red brick building flanked by noble trees, and up to which a fine, carefully-swept carriage drive led. He walked up the drive in some trepidation, and pulled the wrought iron bell-pendant.

Almost as soon as he had let go of the handle, the door swung open, and a respectable looking old manservant, with the evident air of an ex-army man about him, stood before him.

"Is Colonel Antrobus in?" Monteith asked.

"Yes, sir," came the answer. "Will you please to step this way?"

He followed the servant across a stone-flagged hall, hung with trophies of the chase, curious armour, and a few tattered flags whose faded fabric had evidently been riddled and rent by shot and ball.

The lackey opened a door leading out of the hall, and Eric found himself in a beautiful oak-panelled chamber, with a desk in the window, and all the usual appurtenances of a well-appointed study.

"What name shall I say, sir?" asked the man.

"Mr. Eric Monteith," came the answer. "Son of Major Ivor Monteith, late of the Rosshires."

The man stiffened automatically.

"A gallant gentleman, your father, sir," he said respectfully. "I was in his regiment."

Eric's face flushed with pride. "I am glad to meet one of my father's old comrades," he said.

The man retired, and in a few moments the door reopened to admit as fine a specimen of veteran manhood as Eric remembered ever to have seen. With grizzled thick hair, and face browned with exposure to the tropical sun, blue eyes as keen as a hawk, and erect alert carriage, despite his sixty odd years, well over six feet in height, such was Colonel Antrobus.

"So you're Eric," he said, holding out a long lean hand. "What good wind brings you to Birmingham? Ah, I see you're your father's son. A better comrade no man ever had."

"I was only a little boy when I saw you last, sir," said the young man, "but I remember your face distinctly."

"And how goes the world with you?" went on the other "You've not followed in your father's footsteps, have you?"

"No, sir. At the death of my father my sister Alice and I were left rather poorly off. Then we came into a pretty considerable fortune left to us by our mother's sister, and now I've taken to the stage."

"The stage!" A look almost of horror came into the old soldier's face. "That's not the profession for Ivor Monteith's son. A loafing, idling, drinking life, a life that has been the undoing of many a fine young man who ought to have been serving his King and country over seas."

Look at page 432.

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Eric flushed. "The profession was none of my seeking, sir," he said almost haughtily. "I did not go on the stage to suit my own interests. I like the life scarcely better than you do."

"Then, why in Heaven's name, not cut yourself adrift from it?" cried Antrobus almost irascibly.

Eric hesitated. Then he determined on a bold course.

"It was for the sake of a lady," he said in a low voice, "with whom I think you are already acquainted, a Miss Harlow."

"A lady with whom I am already acquainted?" echoed the Colonel in utter amazement. "I know no lady of that name. I never was much of a lover of the fair sex."

"Then you have never met Miss Harlow?" went on Eric in a low voice, a growing fear clutching at his heart.

"Never, sir," came the answer with obviously growing ire.

"And you're not acquainted with a Mr. Jacob Dimsdale?"

"He is also unknown to me," came the quick answer.

Eric was in a dilemma. He had learnt what he wanted to know, namely, that somehow Hazel and Jenny had been entrapped by some person masquerading under Antrobus's name, but he found it difficult to explain to the old soldier the full story of what he knew. Then a sudden inspiration came to him. He drew a photograph from his breast pocket and handed it over to his father's old friend for inspection.

"What do you think of that, sir?" he asked in a low voice.

Antrobus took the photograph and examined it attentively. It was a portrait of Hazel. After a few moments he handed it back to Monteith.

"I think it's the picture of the most beautiful woman I've ever seen," he said.

Eric put the photograph back into his pocket. "Then with your permission, sir," he said, "I will tell you the story of the original and how I came to be brought into her life. You shall then judge for yourself."

Then in as few words as possible he told Colonel Antrobus Hazel's story. How the girl had been forced to flee from her home; how alone and unprotected she had come to London; how Fate had sent her to his house; how she had been tracked and persecuted by Horace Caldecott; and how he, Eric, had fallen madly in love with her, and had become an actor to guard her life from ill.

"And now," he said in conclusion, "I will tell you why I asked you if you knew Miss Harlow. It is because she has been invited by a Colonel Antrobus, reputing himself to be late of the Rosshire Buffs, to supper at his house to-night. She is to go in company with another lady and her uncle. I knew that was not like the Colonel Antrobus who was my father's dearest friend, and so I determined to come and find out for myself."

For a few moments after the recital of this story the old soldier found but little to say. His eyes were fixed scrutinisingly on Eric's face.

"Upon my word," he said at last, "The days of knight errantry are by no means over even in this 20th century. So it is for a woman that you have become an actor. Well, let that pass. What concerns me is to think that there is some villain masquerading under the name that has never in my life-time been mixed up in any intrigue. This is a serious matter and must be looked into."

"Might I make a suggestion?" put in Eric. "It is that you leave the matter in my hands. I can quite see that it would be extremely unpleasant for you to allow yourself to be dragged into an affair that may have the most tawdry elements as its basis. Whoever the villain is who is masquerading under your name, I think now that I know the facts of the case I shall be able to cope with him. Do you agree, sir? Will you allow the settlement of this affair to rest in my hands?"

The Colonel hesitated. There was, however, something in Eric's face and manner of quiet, manly decision, that did not fail to make its impression upon the old soldier, and that won the day.

"Very well, my lad," he said, "I'll leave it to you on condition that you tell me how you played the game after it's all over."

"I'll do that willingly," answered the other, "unless ——" he broke off abruptly. It was on the tip of his tongue to say, "unless I am prevented from doing so," for he had of course no idea of what lay before him in his attempt to unearth the mystery surrounding the bogus Colonel Antrobus.

The old soldier noted his hesitation, and read his thoughts. "The lad's a plucked one," he said to himself, "there's danger before him in this business. Ah, well, he won't be Ivor Monteith's son if he can't pull through somehow."

"And now I'll be going, sir," said Eric, "to-morrow I hope to be able to report further to you on the matter."

"And now comes the question," ran Eric's thoughts as he walked down the broad avenue that led to the entrance gates, "how I'm to circumvent this plot of the false Colonel Antrobus whatever it may be. Is it possible that that villain Caldecott's hand can again be traced in this? I think my next move will be a visit to Mr. Jacob Dimsdale. I should very much like to know what his share in the business can be." Thus thinking, he drew in sight of the massive wrought iron gates that opened out on to the quiet thoroughfare that ran along the grounds of Colonel Antrobus' property.

A couple of juniper trees were set on either side of the gate inside the garden. At the foot of one of them Eric's quick eyes were attracted by a sealed envelope that lay as though someone had purposely placed it there. Naturally enough he turned aside to satisfy his curiosity as to what the note might be. This act proved his undoing. Almost before he had time to realise what had happened and just as he was in the act of stooping down to appropriate the note, a quick footfall sounded on the gravel behind him. A figure had stepped out from behind the other juniper; in his hand a short loaded cane. Before Eric had time to recover his normal position, the man had brought down the murderous-looking weapon with stunning force at the back of his head, just above the nape of the neck. With a faint cry the luckless man fell like a pole-axed bullock.

Quick as lightning his assailant stooped down and, ransacking his pockets, removed all the papers he found therein. Then lifting the body, having first of all hurled his weapon away into the brushwood, he carried the lifeless burden out into the roadway. Not a soul was in the street. The unknown miscreant deposited Monteith upon the pavement and gave vent to a low breath of apparent satisfaction. He was a tall, elderly, well-dressed man, and did not seem to be at all the sort of person one would take to be a common footpad.

"Neatly done," he muttered "the fish took the bait.

Mr. Henry T. Johnson's new serial starts week after next.

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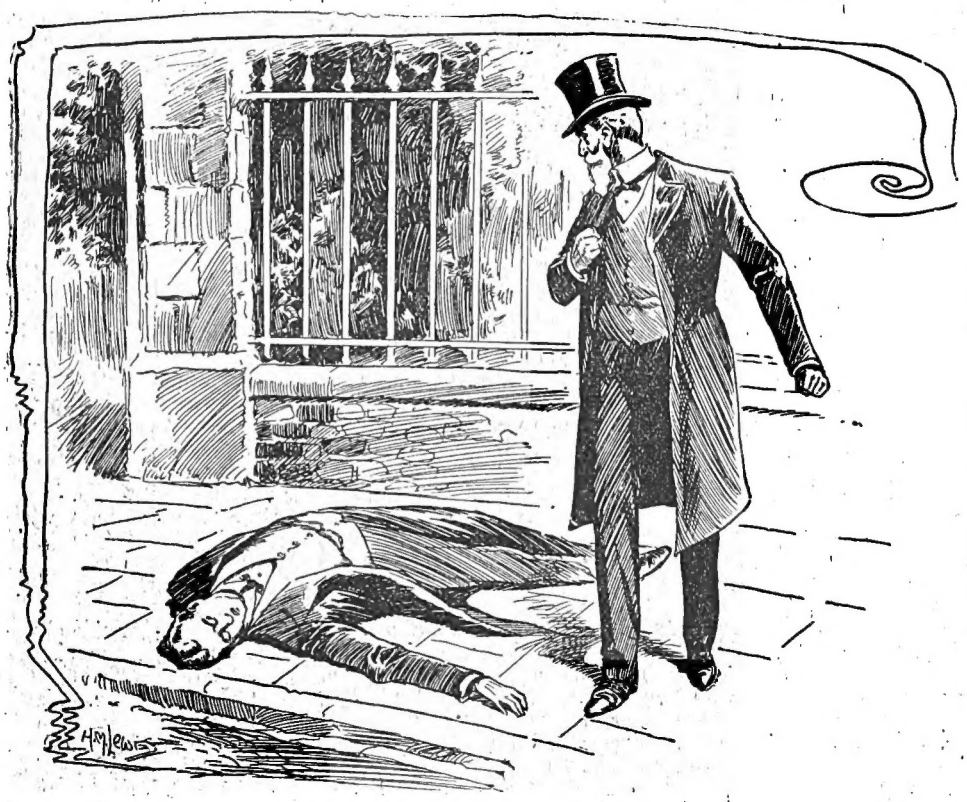
I think we've settled your hash for a while, Mr. Monteith. It'll be twenty hours or more before you become conscious. That blow means concussion of the brain for a certainty. It'll teach you to mind your own business, and when you do come to yourself I don't think you'll be able to do any further harm. I was rather a fool to adopt the personality of Colonel Antrobus, and if I hadn't dogged your footsteps, and if things hadn't turned out as well as they have, you might have been able to call checkmate."

At that moment the figure of a policeman came into view proceeding leisurely along the quiet road. In a moment Caldecott, for it was the ubiquitous ruffian himself, began waving vigorously to the constable who, perceiving that something was amiss, hurried forward at the top of his speed.



The unknown miscreant deposited Monteith upon the pavement, and gave vent to a low breath of apparent satisfaction.

"Just in the nick of time, constable," said the cool-blooded villain, "here's a job for you. I just found this unfortunate gentleman lying, as you see him, upon the pavement. I should say that he had been knocked on the head by a footpad who hadn't time to appropriate his belongings. I came round the corner of the road to find him lying as you see him now. All his papers are gone, though his watch and money have been left! Look at this swelling on the back of his head; it's a clear case of concussion. You'd better get him into a vehicle, and drive him off to the General Hospital. He's in a bad way. I'll give you my card, so that if necessary I can be called upon to say what I know about the business."

Caldecott spoke quietly and with confidence. There was not the faintest evidence to implicate him in any way with the cowardly assault. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that the policeman saw no reason to disbelieve his story.

"There's a cab rank at the end of the road, sir," said the officer. "Perhaps you won't mind sending a cab down here as you go. I'll wait here with this gentleman, and if you'll give me your card as you said there will be no need for you to stay any longer."

Caldecott pulled out his card-case and handed the man a piece of pasteboard upon which was neatly engraved, "Sir James Henderson, 116 Calthorpe Road."

Caldecott was not the sort of man to do things by halves. Thorough - paced scoundrel as he was he was always equipped with every sort of device to aid him in the furtherance of his crimes. He gave half-a-crown to the policeman. "Do your best for the poor fellow," he said, and hurried away towards the cab-rank.

"That's a gentleman," muttered the policeman, pocketing the coin. "Now I wonder what is the explanation of this little game. This won't be a nice thing for me when it comes known at head quarters that there's been a highway assault here in one of the best streets in Edgbaston in broad daylight. Yet I don't see how a man can be everywhere at once. Whoever the chap was who knocked this gentleman on the head he knew where to plant his blow." The constable stooped down and examined the unfortunate Monteith's pale expressionless face.

"Hullo, my man, what's this?" said a voice in his ear. The constable sprang up in a moment. Colonel Antrobus stood before him. The Colonel gave one swift glance at the motionless body, and a cry escaped his lips.

"Eric Monteith!" he said sharply, "what's the meaning of this?"

In as few words as possible the policeman told the story of how he had come across the senseless Eric.

"Help me to lift him up," said Antrobus with military

Have you claimed that £5 note?

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precision, "and let us take him inside my house. I know him well."

The constable obeyed, and together the two men bore the helpless body up the drive.

In the meanwhile Caldecott had hurried down towards the cab-rank only to find that there was no cab there. An expression of annoyance crossed his face. "Confound it!" he said. "It won't do to leave things as they are. The fellow must be got inside a hospital before some philanthropic busybody comes along and spoils my game."

He walked swiftly back to the end of the road from where he could see all down the street in which he had left the policeman and his victim.

An oath escaped him. Save for a solitary pedestrian there was no one to be seen. Eric Monteith had disappeared and the constable with him. Where had they gone to?

He hurried back the way he had just come to run full-tilt against the policeman himself who was issuing from the gateway that led to Rosshire Lodge.

"What's this?" cried Caldecott.

"Colonel Antrobus has got the poor gentleman safe and sound, sir," answered the other quickly. "I'm just going for a doctor. Colonel Antrobus knows the gentleman quite well, and is going to keep him there instead of sending him to the hospital."

With a mighty effort Caldecott concealed the deep chagrin and hot rage in his bosom at this unexpected event. In a moment all his calculations were scattered to the winds. He knew full well that Eric had probably divulged the fact that he himself as the false Colonel Antrobus, had been laying siege to the girlish susceptibilities of Hazel Harlow and Jenny Lovelace. There might, of course, be a chance that such was not the case, but that Eric's visit to the Colonel had been merely a friendly one. If this was so the plot that he and Dimsdale had concocted to entrap Hazel might still be successfully perpetrated. He determined to hurry back to Dimsdale's house and have a hasty consultation with him as to their next move. There was little fear that Eric would recover consciousness for a good many hours.

It was past five when he reached Dimsdale's house. "Mr. Dimsdale was in his study," the footman said. "Shall I show you up, sir?"

"No," answered Caldecott, "I know my way perfectly. I'll run up immediately." So saying he sprang up the richly carpeted stairway, and made his way unerringly to Dimsdale's sanctum.

He knocked at the door. There was no answer. Unceremoniously he pushed open the portal and stormed inside the room.

Dimsdale was sitting at the desk set in a big bay window at the far end of the luxurious apartment. He was apparently engaged in writing. Caldecott hurried forward and laid his hand upon the shoulder of his partner in crime.

"Dimsdale," he cried hoarsely, "rouse up and stir yourself. If we are not careful the fat will be in the ——" his words died away into nothingness.

In Dimsdale's right hand in place of a pen, was clutched a small bottle. His other hand contained a sealed envelope. As for the man's face it had on it a look of ghastly that Caldecott recoiled with a cry of horror while beads of perspiration formed upon his forehead.

Dimsdale's eyes were wide open. They were glassily staring straight before him. The muscles of his grey-hued face were rigid and stiff. His face was contorted out of all semblance to himself, as though he had been seized by some terrible pain.

One look told Caldecott the truth. Jacob Dimsdale had gone to his last account. He had died by his own hand.

Even Caldecott, cool, calculating scoundrel that he was, was so unnerved by the ghastly unexpectedness of this terrible tragedy, that he could find no power of action to help him further. Stock still he stood and gazed with terror-stricken eyes upon the miserable wretch who had been goaded by his own conscience to take away the life he had misused. The terror deepened in Caldecott's heart as the full horror of what had happened possessed him momentarily with greater intensity. In another instant, impelled by a power of which he was scarcely conscious, he moved silently towards the door through which he had just come, and sped down the staircase into the hall below. There he found the servant who had only a few moments before admitted him.

"Go to your master," he muttered hoarsely, and before the astonished footman could recover from the surprise at his words and gestures, he had opened the front door and dashed madly, unthinkingly, away.

CHAPTER V.

RAYMOND VENABLES, the manager of *The Good Samaritan* Company, was in the box-office of the Theatre Royal, himself seeing to the sale of seats for that evening's performance. It was about six o'clock, and he was expecting the advent of Monteith, who had arranged to meet him at the theatre at about that hour.

Suddenly an elderly gentleman put his head in through the box-office window and asked courteously if he could see the manager of the company.

"I am the manager," answered Venables, his curiosity slightly aroused. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"I should like a private word in your ear," was the answer, and the old gentleman produced a card, upon which was written, "Lieutenant-Colonel C. Alister Antrobus."

"Will you come with me to my room?" said Venables courteously, and led the way to a private ante-room adjoining the stage of the theatre.

"I regret to tell you, sir," began the old soldier, "that a sad accident has happened to one of the members of your company, Mr. Eric Monteith, with whom I am intimately acquainted. He is at present lying in my house at Edgbaston, suffering from a bad concussion of the brain, caused by a dastardly assault by some unknown miscreant. The doctor tells me it will be some weeks before he will be fit for much again."

Regret was visible on every line of Venables's countenance at this piece of bad news.

"How did it happen, sir?" he asked quickly.

"I cannot tell you any more than I have done," replied the Colonel, "with the exception of the fact that a loaded bludgeon was found in the grounds of my house with which the blow was probably struck. There is no chance of his being able to act to-night, or indeed for a good many nights. I have a favour to ask of you and that is that you will let me have a word with Miss Hazel Harlow."

The mystification deepened on Venables's countenance.

"That is a request I can easily grant, sir," he answered. "I need hardly say how deeply I am grieved to hear such an accident has happened to Mr. Monteith. If

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is at least refreshing to know that he is in such good hands."

Hazel and Jenny were, as luck would have it, both at that moment within the theatre precincts. They were both much surprised to hear that Colonel Antrobus had called to see them without Jenny's uncle, for they were of course under the impression that "Colonel Antrobus" was the man who had invited them to supper that night, and whom they had met at Dimsdale's house.

Judge of their surprise then on being presented to the real upholder of the name of Antrobus, who was so very different from the man they already pictured as being the genuine Colonel.

So mystified was Hazel that the old soldier at once read in her countenance what was passing in her mind.

"You have been the victim of a cruel deception, my dear young ladies," he began kindly, and without further preliminary. "Some rascal has been masquerading under my name; for what reasons I won't pretend to know, but I much suspect that he is the same who has been responsible for the sad accident that has happened to Mr. Eric Monteith," and he forthwith proceeded to give a detailed account of how Eric had come to his house, had told him the sad story, and of the finding of the lifeless body of the young man outside his own front gates.

Jenny's first thoughts went to her uncle Jacob. What on earth could be the meaning of his part in this disgraceful affair? As for Hazel, her thoughts flew to her stricken friend lying so sorely wounded at the house in Edgbaston.

The Colonel read the sorrow in her face aright. "With Heaven's help we'll pull him round, Miss Harlow," he said fervently, "and remember it was for your sake."

Needless to say neither Mr. Jacob Dimsdale nor the pseudo-Colonel Antrobus turned up after the performance that night in accordance with the preconcerted plan. It was not till the next morning that Jenny and Hazel read in the paper the story of how Jacob Dimsdale had met his death. The following is a verbatim account of the dread occurrence:

"SUICIDE OF A BIRMINGHAM MANUFACTURER.

"A Terrible Story.

"Yesterday Mr. Jacob Dimsdale, the head of the great firm of electro-platers, trading in Regent's Place, under the name of Dimsdale and Company, Limited, committed suicide by taking laudanum. The reason for this terrible act is to be found in a confession written and signed by the late Mr. Dimsdale, admitting to a crime long forgotten, and for which an innocent man has already paid the penalty. It appears that when Mr. Dimsdale first started in business in Birmingham, he had been associated with a young man named Durnford. Both these two young men were greatly addicted to card-playing. A forged cheque was uttered, and the authorship of the crime traced to young Mr. Durnford, who had been hard pressed for money to pay his gambling debts. The young fellow was sentenced to penal servitude, and died in prison, stoutly maintaining his innocence to the last. In the confession found at the late Mr. Dimsdale's house by the police, is a full acknowledgment that his was the hand that forged the cheque for which Durnford suffered punishment. Our regrets and sympathy must be given to Mrs. Dimsdale, who was of course in total ignorance of the black affair that has proved to bear such terrible fruit. Mr. Dimsdale comes of an old and unimpeachable family. The bulk of Mr. Dimsdale's fortune is bequeathed to charities."

As for Horace Caldecott his part in the event that led immediately up to Jacob Dimsdale's death never transpired. Even his passion for Hazel was swamped by the memory of that last scene in Jacob Dimsdale's study.

His one idea was to leave Birmingham, to get away from the city that had been so fraught with incident for all concerned. The plan that he had conceived of ensnaring Hazel remained locked up in his own breast.

But if he had once got the helpless girl into the house that he had hired during his brief stay in Birmingham there is but little reason to doubt that he would have found some means of achieving his fell ends, those of getting the girl into his power, for by diabolical stratagem he had rendered Eric a non-combatant in the affair. It was destiny that had stepped in and over-ruled his machinations.

During the rest of the company's stay in Birmingham Hazel gave up all her time by day to nursing Eric, for a great sadness filled her heart. She knew full well that some time must elapse before Monteith could again take up his part as a member of *The Good Samaritan* Company, and she did not like to think of what life would be without the presence of the young man to cheer and sustain her, for although Love, the divine, had not yet been kindled in her heart, she had still a feeling for Eric such as she had for no other man. The true steadfastness of his nature, the unselfish devotion that had prompted him to give up so much for her sake, had won a hold upon her heart. She knew, moreover, that trials and tribulations still lay ahead of her. Young, beautiful, stainless as she was, she was nevertheless beset by foes who would leave no stone unturned to accomplish her undoing. Small wonder that the future loomed before her dark and forbidding.

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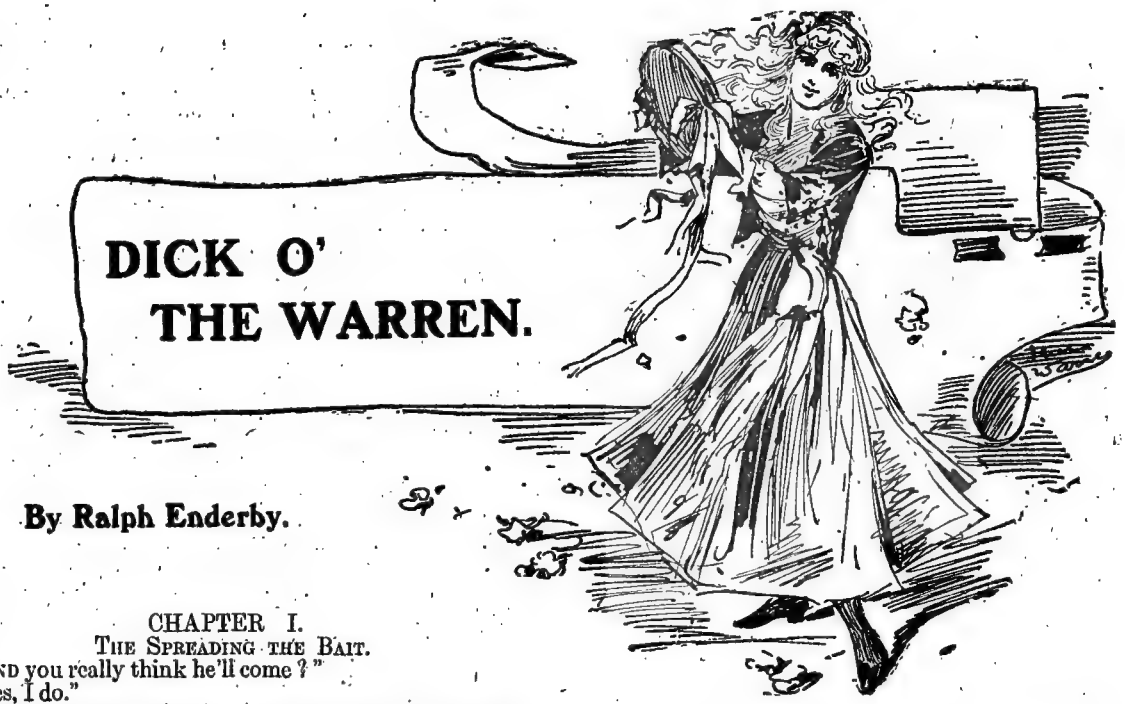

DICK O' THE WARREN.

By Ralph Enderby.

CHAPTER I.

The Spreading the Bait.

"And you really think he'll come?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I wouldn't mind the wagering barest odds that he won't!"

"I'll take you! though it's almost like picking your pocket. Dick Westaway, whatever else he may be—dense, dull, and beastly rich—is, or was, rather, for neither you or I have seen him any time these ten years, punctual to a hair in everything."

"Yes, I know; but he mightn't be quite so dense or so dull now. These slow-witted fools, especially when they tumble into money, sometimes develop highly objectionable wariness and super-shrewdness."

"Sometimes, yes; always, no; and Dick Westaway will, unless I am very much mistaken, remain to the end of his days the blundering dunderheaded ass we knew him at Eton and at King's."

Archie Daunt, the last speaker, was not a man who most people would be inclined to accept at his own valuation, beyond that a general agreement must have been come to with regard to his cleverness—of a sort; cleverness most suspiciously akin to cunning.

Still, he contrived to appear, to the average person, the deft, tactful, pleasant man of the world. The best dressed man in town, people almost invariably forgot to notice the many silvery threads interspersed among the abundant fair hair; the faint, but sure signs of slowly advancing age. Eight-and-forty, if he was a day, Archie Daunt might very well have passed for ten years younger at the very least.

A close man; one who never, by any chance, revealed his own secrets, he was suave and smooth to a degree. With a smile ever, in public, on lip and in eye, both were as the unyielding gates to the real thoughts of the man, the very innermost workings of a dark and dead-cold spirit.

One man there was who knew him, or who, at least, approached as nearly to knowing him as such knowledge was possible.

This was Blair Anstie, his present companion, although even he oftentimes had his doubts as to the real value of his own estimate of his friend.

But Blair Anstie did not trouble himself much on this score. One of the easy-conscienced, "doesn't-mind much" type of individual, he let everything in life swing subservient to his own present peace and comfort—at someone else's expense. That it should have been at Archie Daunt's cost most men marvelled.

The two were always together, or, at any rate, not far apart. It was the elder man's habit of systematically "putting him up to a good thing" that kept Mr. Anstie's mill going and his head above water.

The good thing might not always be absolutely moral, or respectable, but, from the point of view of both of them, it served, and the toady's banking account was kept at solvent point accordingly.

When, many years before, the pair were professed tuft-hunters at Cambridge, Dick Westaway "came up" from Eton. They had known him there, but were never very enthusiastic about him.

In those days Dick was not a rich "possible," or with any reasonable prospect of ever becoming one; Daunt and Anstie, therefore, had no particular care for him.

The son of a fairly prosperous doctor in the West-end of London, Dick was four removes from the baronetcy and Yorkshire estates of Sir John Westaway, of "the Warren," near Ripley, by the river wharf. A boating accident reduced the intervening lives to two, and things stood at this when Daunt and Anstie ultimately left the University. Since then they had heard nothing of their quondam fellow "undergrad" till about a week previous to the above recorded conversation, which took place over late breakfast at Archie Daunt's chambers St. Margaret's Mansions, S.W.

It was a paragraph in the *Times*, first seen by Blair

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Anstie, announcing the almost simultaneous deaths of Sir John Westaway and his two immediate heirs, apparent and presumptive.

This was followed by the information that the title and estates now descended to Richard Hoyle Westaway, next in succession, and now tenth baronet. It was added that the deceased's personality, all of which was bequeathed to Dick Westaway, amounted to, it was believed, over three millions sterling.

The consultation, consequent upon this news, between Daunt and his ally, was that morning long and earnest.

"Now, Blair, my boy, this is a gift from the gods," said Daunt impressively, "and accordingly as we work it so will the result be to us."

"As how?" queried the other.

"Simply, my dear fellow, by a reasonable revival of the ancient and gentle pastime of falconry, or hawking."

"I don't exactly see——"

"No, I don't suppose you do quite—yet, but when I say that a 'lure' will be needful to the due snaring of the quarry, why, probably, light will break for you—eh?"

Briefly a plan was arranged which should have for its object the renewing of old-time acquaintance with Dick Westaway, and the persuading him, if possible, up to town for purposes best known to themselves.

Daunt's first move in the game was to drive to the house of his sister in Alma Square, St. John's Wood.

"You know, Margot," he said persuasively, after he had explained the object of his visit, "I have no one but you to do the honours for me, and Dick Westaway is such a big swell now that I want the thing done in as good style as may be. You remember Dick Westaway?" he went on, "that shambling, good-natured young giant who persisted in making love to you the night of your birthday ball in Duke Street, just before the pater died."

"Oh, yes, I recollect him! and he is coming up to dine with you, you say?—poor fellow!"

"What do you mean?" said her brother, badly disguising an angry snarl, and uneasily gnawing his moustache. "I think it is *rich fellow* he ought to be called now."

"Of course! I was forgetting! And you wish me to head your table and play the hostess for you? Very well, I will do so. When is the feast to be?"

"To-morrow evening. Westaway is to be at my place at eight. Make yourself nice, there's a good girl—but there! you always do yourself credit."

"Thanks, Archie, awfully! And now that is settled I am going to be busy, and must turn you out."

Margot Daunt, in years twenty-seven, and one of the most beautiful women to be found in all London (which is saying much), had, up to this, failed in woman's one acknowledged mission, the finding a husband. There was no accounting for this, for she was in all ways formed to be the desire of a good man's heart and eyes.

She was gifted beyond the ordinary with the penetrative sense, and, with regard to human nature, could read where others scarce could spell. She had no very exalted opinion of her brother's character or pursuits, and so instinctively suspected danger for this newly rich but single-hearted young fellow, fresh as he was to all the allurements, so ready to the hand, and so daintily spread when money is plentiful.

But it was curiosity as much as anything else which influenced her to fall in so complacently with her brother's proposal.

She had a strange desire to see Dick Westaway again, why she didn't know beyond that she had a rather pleasant remembrance of her one-time boyish admirer. That she hoped by her presence to counteract any evil intentions Archie Daunt might have concerning his guest was certain, and when, on the morrow evening, her brother entered the room with the big, fair-haired young baronet, and introduced him to her, she told herself that she would see the thing through at whatever cost to herself.

"Do you know, Miss Daunt," said Dick gaily, "that I have never forgotten that birthday dance of yours. Things have changed since with me a bit, but with you—not an iota!"

"It is very good of you to say so, of course, but I must tell you that I never, on any consideration, allow compliments—they make me angry."

"Then I will not pay you another compliment, for, to speak honestly, I do not like them myself. By the way, what name do you think they've given me down at my place?"

"I really couldn't guess."

"No, I don't suppose you could. You are aware, perhaps that my place is called 'The Warren.' Well, the folk round about, only knowing me, on my visits to my uncle, as Master Dick, and sometimes Dick, when familiarity got the better of respect, have actually dubbed me 'Dick o' the Warren,' the veritable nick-name, if you please, of a certain notorious ancestor of ours, who lived uncleanly, and died shamefully, some two centuries ago, in Dutch William's time. How's that, Miss Daunt? The name is assuredly picturesque, but its application to myself isn't quite complimentary, is it?"

"Oh! I don't know," Daunt replied, seeing that his sister was inclined to, as he thought, take matters too seriously. "I don't know, Westaway; it's a good name, a name out of the common, so, as Trent says that dinner is served, I will ask you to take in my sister, 'Dick o' the Warren.' Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER II.

The Quarry Breaks its Wing.

In the little station-yard at Ripley stood a smart dog-cart and a roomy wagonette, in charge of a couple of grooms in dark livery.

"The six-eighteen's late," said he of the dog-cart.

"Is it? That don't matter much—we've done for to-day when we've taken this lot up. The master's with 'em, ain't he, Ben?"

"Yes. Hullo! 'ere she comes round the bend! Woa, fidget (to his especial quadruped), what's up with you? Know who's close handy, I suppose!"

The train ran in, out of it stepping a party of six, two ladies and four gentlemen, followed by a couple of maids.

"Deuced out-of-the-way place this of yours, Dick!" said Archie Daunt.

"D'you think so?" replied his host. "Well, I don't know; perhaps it's because I've known it, on and off, ever since I was a lad, but I hold it to be just the most perfect place under the sun; don't you, Miss Congreve?"

The lady addressed had settled herself comfortably, and to her entire satisfaction, in the only available seat in the dog-cart, which held two, besides the driver. She was a handsome woman, dark, with glorious eyes, and with a mouth which, though in shape and general expression such as alone would have turned the head of any ordinary man, still had about it something hard and unsympathetic. Her attire was ultra-fashionable, betraying, as it did, the

Have you claimed that £5 note?

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"I have only to say that early this morning Miss Congreve and myself were married."

undoubtedly theatrical taste of the wearer. "Professional"—of a kind—was writ large on every flounce and scrap of trimming; the young lady—she was not more than one-and-twenty—being, in fact, Miss Lilian Congreve, a leading London variety artist, and the especial friend of Mr. Archie Daunt.

Replying to Dick's appeal she said that it looked pretty, what she could see of it, but that she could express no definite opinion until she had seen her dog—her dear, darling Fido — safely disposed in the quarters assigned to her at "The Warren."

Margot Daunt eyed the little lady with undeniable, if furtive, disapproval. She herself would not have come but that she conceived Dick incapable of looking after his own interests, to guard which, as far as in her lay, she had constituted herself his devoted shadow. She felt her position in that company to be somewhat open to question, but would not abandon her determination to watch developments.

It was a jovial, merry party assembled in the old Yorkshire manor house, and Dick Westaway was the lord, if not of misrule, of something, at any rate, very much like it.

True, there was no viciousness in his boisterous boyishness, or in his enthusiastic catering for the amusement of his guests. He was just a happy-hearted, irresponsible king of sports.

Daunt and Anstic, while seconding in a well-bred superciliously tolerant sort of way their host's efforts, were not a little impatient that their scheme did not make the progress they, or rather, Daunt, more particularly, desired.

Then, a hint dropped by his sister, that she was not altogether ignorant of that which he contemplated for Dick's detriment, contributed to make Daunt at once uneasy and savage. Uneasy, as fearing to lose hold of his prospective prey, and savage, in that he had been fool enough to allow Margot so good a view of his ugly purpose.

Look out for "Dead to the World."

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"Look here, Anstie!" he said one day to his satellite, when the two were enjoying the after-dinner cigar under a tree on the lawn: "We must hasten things a bit. Anyone—a blind man, even—can see that Margot is more than a little gone on Westaway, and that being so, she'll thwart us at every turn. I think, too, the fool likes her; but it's not my book to let him have her, for, knowing her as I do, once married or even engaged to him, and it will be good-bye to our chance for a share of the Westaway millions."

"Well, what do you propose?" asked Anstie. "You can't exactly order a woman of your sister's age not to encourage Westaway; and I'm sure it wouldn't be safe to try and drive *him*. He's wonderfully like, do you know, that portrait of old 'Dick o' the Warren' in the long gallery; and, I for one, shouldn't care to tackle him on a tender point."

"You're an idiot! You ought to know by this time, I think, that I never, upon principle, resort to force, save under extreme pressure, and we haven't arrived at that yet."

"And I hope never shall!" fervently remarked Anstie, between two dense ejections of tobacco smoke.

"Oh! And why not, pray? You're a cruel coward, Blair, my son! And if ever you back out on the emergency, and leave me to fight it single-handed, mark me! but I'll kill you! Yes, I'll kill you!"

Blair Anstie's cigar dropped out of his fingers on to the grass, as Archie Daunt bent over towards him, and looked him squarely between the eyes. Then the arch-conspirator sank slowly back into his former position, smiling that eternal smile of his, which boded ill for somebody, and which, somehow, always irritated the other, while it tended to frighten and to disturb him.

"Just pull yourself together!" said Daunt again. "and listen to me! You, as well as I, can see that Westaway won't touch the cards. There's only one way, then, by which we can now gain our end, and that is—through Lilian!"

"Well," replied Anstie, with a curiously meaning little laugh, "I fancy you won't have much trouble there. I overheard something last night which——"

"Spit it out! What?"

"Why, which makes it as clear as daylight that your game is being played for you; and in right good earnest, too, by the young lady herself."

CHAPTER III.

In the Snare of the Fowler.

The drawing-room at the "Warren" was an immense chamber, long, and with half-a-dozen big French windows facing the garden terrace.

The men are at billiards. Margot is in her room, and alone, with her hands idly lying in her lap, sits Lilian Congreve.

She has, somehow, lost that lightly-worn smile of hers, that trick of gay, reckless *abandon*, hitherto almost habitual with her.

She is talking to herself.

"Why," she says bitterly, "why should I run Archie Daunt's course? He doesn't know how I love this man!—that 'Dick o' the Warren' loves me! But he does, he does, for he has told me so; has sworn that I—the the daughter of 'old Bet,' the drunken orange-hawker of Drury Lane—the once little flower-girl of the Shaftesbury Fountain—am more to him than is the whole wide world. He is so big, so strong, and splendid, that how could I help but love him?"

"By just packing-up, my dear, and taking the next train for town," said a deliberate voice from behind her.

"Archie Daunt! You are well set to work, I think, to spy even upon my very thoughts!"

"You shouldn't speak them so loudly, then. But I've something to say to you, and as it intimately concerns you, I should strongly advise you to listen to me carefully."

She turned from him with an air of contemptuous indifference, answering him not a word.

"I have changed my mind during the past twenty-four hours," he went on. "You and I have been very good friends up to now; indeed, it was my intention to have done you the honour of making you an offer, but, as I have said, I have changed my mind."

Still she did not speak.

"I find," he continued, in even cutting tones, "on consideration, that your own evident plan will suit me quite as well, if not better. Now I am ready to help you, on one condition—that you help *me*."

"Help *you*?"

"Yes. You surely do not imagine that it was for your mere enjoyment and benefit that I got you here? or that you might *seriously* exercise your fascinations upon our impressionable friend—eh?"

Still silence.

"It was, as you very well know, that you might act as a foil to my precious sister, whom Westaway insisted upon inviting down here, and who is determined to put a spoke in my wheel!"

"You never spoke a truer word in your life, Archie!"

He turned sharply to encounter Margot, who had quietly come in at the window from the terrace.

"Now, Archie," she continued, "don't go, as you and I have something to say to each other. Nor you, if you don't mind, Miss Congreve; it may be as well, perhaps, that a witness should be present."

He threw the cigar he was smoking savagely out through the window, and lit another.

"I know," said Margot, "that you have deliberately planned to rob—don't interrupt me, please—to rob Sir Richard Westaway. I know that you already have, even in this short space, borrowed from him—or, shall we rather say, forced him to lend you—certain large sums of money. From what your friend Mr. Anstie has told me——"

"Oh! he has been talking, has he? Well, I will settle with him by-and-bye."

"I should advise you to be careful, Archie, how you proceed with regard to him, or, indeed, at all. You are my brother, but surely you have not in your veins one drop of my mother's blood! I will never forgive you for even suggesting to me, however indirectly, the bolstering up of your wretched scheme. Miss Congreve, I ask your pardon. but will you let me beg of you, if you are in any way cognisant—which I hope and believe you are not—of what is going on, to cease any further hand-in-handness with Mr. Daunt."

Lilian Congreve was not a bad woman. Frivolous she was, fond of display and admiration, but beneath it all there was a genuine under-current of true womanly right principle.

She stood up and looked Margot steadfastly in the face for half a moment.

"Miss Daunt," she at length said, "your brother, I

Look at page 432.

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think, quite understands that any collaboration between us is impossible."

"I am glad!" Margot smilingly replied.

"But," continued the girl, a trifle unsteadily, "the fact which renders it more than ever impossible is, perhaps, not quite so well known to him. It cannot be told by me. Sir Richard Westaway must himself communicate it to you!"

"Sir Richard!"

"Dick Westaway!" Margot and her brother exclaimed in one breath.

"Yes, and as I hear him coming from the billiard-room, he no doubt will do as I wish."

"Hullo! Archie! Hullo! Miss Daunt! What's in the wind?"

Then his glance fell upon the figure of Lilian Congreve, whom at first he did not see, and who stood waiting for him to speak.

"Do you want me?" he said to the girl, his manner conveying to the others present—Daunt and his sister—an impression of studied confidence, and intense, if restrained personal feeling.

"Please tell them," was all she said.

"It was my intention," he said, after a moment's hesitation, "to have kept this matter secret until—well—until I had made certain private arrangements, which I considered necessary; but since this lady," taking her hand and lifting it to his lips, "has asked me to divulge it—for very good reason, I am sure—I have only to say that this morning, during an early drive, Miss Congreve and myself were married at Pately Bridge church, and that 'Dick o' the Warren' is a very fortunate as well as a very happy man."

CHAPTER IV.

Wounded and Free.

One morning all London was startled to its centre by the newspaper announcement of a terrible tragedy.

"Between half-past ten and a quarter to eleven last night, Lilian Congreve, the leading light of the variety stage, who, by mutual consent had, for the past five years, been separated from her husband, Sir Richard Hoyle Westaway, Bart., was shot as she passed to her brougham from the stage entrance of the Stadium. She died immediately.

"The man who fired the shot, and who is in custody on a charge of wilful murder, is a well-known man-about-town, of good family, but of somewhat shady reputation, one Archibald Daunt.

"The assassin made no effort to escape when taken, being calmly occupied in wiping the revolver with his handkerchief."

* * * * *

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Hear what the man says, as he stands in the cool of the tropical evening, with his arm round his wife's shoulders.

"Margot," he whispers, "had I never made my mistake, what would you have done?"

"That which I have actually done, I am afraid," she answers, smiling up at him. "Poor Lilian!"

"Poor Lilian!" echoes "Dick o' the Warren."

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No. 6

No. 7.

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A FARMER, whilst entertaining some visitors to tea, somewhat startled the company by exclaiming to one of the guests: "Stick in, man, stick in; Mr. Broon's twa scones aheid o' ye."

"YOU went right in boldly, did you?" "Yes, after looking in." "And you started ahead and asked the old man for his daughter?" "Well, no; I didn't." "Why not?" "He wasn't there."

JOHNNY: "Mother wants you to come to tea this afternoon." Miss Passee: "That's a nice little fellow; I shall be delighted. Did your mamma say anything else, dear?" Johnny: "Yes; she said she s'posed she might as well have it done with."

"CHILDREN," said the mother of the family, opening the door of the nursery and looking in, "what are you doing to Puggy that makes him yelp so?" "Ben's been using the curling tongs on his tail to make it curl tighter," explained Eunice.

"CHARLIE, dear," said young Mrs. Torkins, "the baby is trying to talk again. It's wonderful how he takes after you!" "What is he talking about?" "I think it must have been politics. He started very calmly, but in a few minutes he was as angry and red in the face as he could be."

LITTLE four-year Harry was not feeling well, and his father suggested that he might be taking the chicken-pox, then prevalent. Harry went to bed laughing at the idea, but early next morning he came downstairs looking very serious, and said: "You're right, papa, it is the chicken pox, I found a feather in the bed."

HIS REVERENCE (at bush accommodation house for the first time): "When does the mail come here, Mr. Clancy?" Mr. Clancy: "It arl depinds, y' riv'rince. Whin there's a letter from our Moike in Western Arstraley, wance in thray months he arlwez carls, but if the letter's a paaper he trows it over the fince widout carlin."

A FORMER vicar of a country parish not far from Sheffield was a distinguished mathematician, and took a high place in the Cambridge Tripos. One day a visitor to the village got into conversation with one of the parishioners, and the talk turned on the vicar. "Your clergyman," said the visitor, "is a very able man. Why, he is a wrangler." "I never heard that," was the villager's reply, "but his missus is."

"How much are these oranges?" said an old lady to a fruit dealer in the market. "Tenpence a dozen, mum." "And those?" "1s. 8d." "What's the difference between them?" "Tenpence, mum."

"DIDN'T you shoot anything at all, John?" "Yes; I got a fine bag of game, but it was stolen from me on the railway." "Well, never mind, John; you've brought home a bran-new story!"

"WHAT did your wife say when you got home last night?" "Nothing." "Nothing? I can't believe that." "Don't blame you, my boy. Wouldn't have believed it m'self unless I'd been there."

DINER: "Come, tell me straight. Is it any real advantage to a man who gives you a tip?" Truthful Waiter: "Honestly, I can't say that it is; but it is apt to go hard with the gentleman that doesn't tip me."

SHARP FATHER: "I believe that handsome stranger has fallen in love with you, my dear." Extravagant Daughter: "Do you? Why?" Sharp Father: "I saw him gazing sadly at that expensive dress you have on."

"NEVER mind," said the poet, as he tossed a rejected poem on the floor, "I'll set the world ablaze yet." "And just to help you start the conflagration," said the better half as she picked up the aforesaid MS., "I'll light the fire in the cook stove with this."

A YOUNG Irishman once went to a kind-hearted old squire for a recommendation. An elaborate one was written and read to him. He took it with thanks, but did not move. "What's the matter with it?" roared the squire. "Oh, nothin', sorr," said the lad quickly. "Well, then, why don't you go?" "Sure, sorr, I thought on the stringth of a recommind like that, you'd be wantin' to employ me."

Photo Competition.

THE names and addresses of the five photos which appeared last week are:—

Mr. Sydney E. Pridham, 58 Mary Arches Street, Exeter.
Mr. H. R. Pead, 58 Newington Green, Islington
Miss Rosa Tallanto-Leech, Blackdown, Fernhurst, Sussex.
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No. 8.

No. 9.

No. 10.

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THE HOUSE WITH TWO DOORS.

A Mystery and the Manner of It.

THE PROLOGUE.

EARLY in the summer of 18—, all London was startled by the supposed murder of a man under somewhat strange circumstances.

The term "murder" is here used with a certain amount of reservation, as, although facts pointed, almost conclusively, to the commission of a great crime, there were not a few criminal scientists who doubted. They could put no theory in the place of that which they questioned; merely suggesting that the murderer, if he ever existed, must needs have been a consummate genius (in a homicidal sense), inasmuch as he had left behind him not even the faintest trace or clue by which the deed could be brought home to him.

Absalom Tighe, bachelor and millionaire, had lived for over twenty years in the dreariest retirement, in an old house on the London side of Edgeware. He kept but one servant, a middle-aged man-of-all-work, his household, such as it was, being supervised and cared for by his niece, Eva Tighe, a girl of twenty-two or thereabouts.

Men of Absalom Tighe's character and disposition often get a reputation for keeping large sums of money in the house—unscrupulous individuals, as often, acting upon the rumour.

When, therefore, the old owner of "The Hermitage" (he was nearly eighty) was one morning discovered by his niece lying with his throat cut from ear to ear on the floor of his sleeping-room, people's minds jumped at once to the conclusion that he had been murdered for as much of his money as there had been in the house.

Subsequent investigation proved, however, that nothing was missing; not even to the value of a single sovereign, or less.

The legal wits working upon the mystery made no headway, and were fain, in less than a month, to give up the chase.

A reward of £500 was publicly offered for the discovery of the criminal or criminals, but elicited nothing; and the "Hermitage" murder bid fair to, in course of time, take its place in the long list of undiscovered crimes.

After her uncle's funeral, Eva Tighe, suddenly and completely disappeared, going none knew whither. All that pertained to her in the shape of personal property she one night removed, without word or sign. The furniture and household belongings were, the week following sold by auction; and, the odd man being paid off—some said pensioned—by Mr. Tighe's solicitor, the house was shut up, pending its sale.

A certain young police recruit, one Paul Wreford at that time qualifying for detective duty, was struck with the curious mysteriousness of the affair. He, for one, did not credit the "murder" theory, "for," as he said at the inquest, where he gave evidence as having been called in by Miss Tighe on the morning of the discovery, "how came it that the razor with which the deed was undoubtedly done was found so close to the dead man's hand? The doctor states that the wound could not possibly have been self-inflicted, judging from, he says natural premises, and from the position of the body when found. That is as it may be — I have my own opinion."

"And that is——?" queried the coroner, blandly, but with just the suspicion of a sneer, expressive of the officer's youth, and presumable inexperience.

"My own," replied Wreford, boldly. "If ever I am to do anything in the solving and unravelling of this mystery, and though I am not officially told off for the duty, no one can prevent me finding out the truth, if I can; I say, if I am to do anything, my ideas and my methods must remain mine, and not the public's."

There was much girding at, and critical contempt for, this callow investigator in both official and lay circles, but he took little heed, and quietly went his way.

One thing troubled him not a little. It was the disappearance of Eva Tighe. For the moment it shattered alike his hopes and one of his most cherished theories with regard to this matter of Absalom Tighe's death.

He had only seen the girl once, and then but for a brief while. It was sufficiently long, however, to thoroughly impress her personality upon him.

"If," he argued with himself, "she knows anything about this thing; or if she herself did it, then I'll give up detecting. But first, to find her! Let me only see her; talk to her, and make her talk, and then perhaps I may find a clue to the death-dealing of old Absalom."

But Eva Tighe was gone beyond his reach, and he felt instinctively that unless chance or fate, or some other like thing, should ever throw her across his path, in some way at present absolutely unknown to him, he should never succeed in the object he had so much at heart.

CHAPTER I.

THE policeman on the beat had watched the house for days, in obedience to official instructions; but as yet nothing had come of it.

The house was peculiar, for London almost unique.

Of but two stories in height, rambling, and in length excessive, it presented to the street its back walls only, pierced with four windows. The front of the house, the real front, gave upon a longish and lovely old-world garden, now a very wilderness of tangle and desolation. At one time the residence of an ancient Admiral, of the old school, dead these two years, it was now (had been in fact for more than a twelvemonth) occupied by a tenant whose face no man, not even the landlord, had ever seen.

The most curious feature about the house was its two street doors. Situated at some little distance from each other, they might easily have been mistaken for the respective entrances to separate dwellings. Strangers often made the mistake, but as knocks were never answered, it did not much matter.

It was the mysterious character of the then tenant that had at last set Mr. Superintendent Hastie thinking. He had heard it whispered that, although the house had been taken by some person in the name of Creeve, no one could say whether it was a man or a woman. Public opinion on the subject was about equally divided.

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The same policeman who reported on Monday the issuing out on Sunday, just before midnight, at one door, of an elderly man, well dressed, but whose face, owing to the darkness, could not be discerned, on the very next night told of a *young lady*, fashionably dressed, but thickly veiled, who left the house about the same time, *by the other door*.

"You're sure," said the superintendent, "that it was a woman you saw to-night?"

"Yes," replied the constable. "I'll swear to it! They may say as there isn't two people living there, but I know better."

"Well, you may be right, and—you may not."

He touched an electric bell.

"Is Wreford in?" to the officer who answered the summons.

"Yes, sir."

"Send him to me. Look here, Davis" (to the constable), "you needn't worry any more about this business, except just to be ready if anything turns up. Ah! Wreford, you've nothing in hand, have you?"

"No—nothing much. Anything special?"

"'M—well, just an enquiry or two, that's all. All right, Davis—that'll do."

Davis would have dearly liked to stay and be taken into confidence. He had a feeling of being slighted.

Plain-clothes-man Wreford was a well set up young fellow of not more than three and twenty, though looking older. Tall, athletic, and more than passably good-looking, he had about him that air of genuine refinement which in the case of the average detective is usually lacking. The "bull-dog" spirit was there, but without the other and peculiar canine characteristics. Add to all this a kindly if keen grey eye, and you have the man.

"It's that house in Underwood Road—we've got to find out what's going on there."

"Do you suspect anything wrong, then?"

"Well, I do and I don't, if you can make that out; but the two are a bit jumbled. I won't tell you what to do, for I believe you're smart enough to act on your own."

"Thanks! You want to know who, what, and why. Well, I'll try and find out for you. Who's on the beat?"

"Davis."

"'M—yokel. Has he told you anything?"

"Yes; says that the night before last, Monday, about 12 p.m., an old gentleman came out of the door nearest to Gwydr Street, and that last night a young woman, fashionably got up, came out of the *other door* at the same hour. He saw neither of them return."

"Ah! only one person supposed to be in the house, is there?"

"So the landlord says."

"He ought to know; but landlord, like other people, don't know everything."

The young detective lost no time in getting to work and within half an hour was outside the mysterious house in Underwood Road.

His first action was ordinary—just a mere commonplace knocking at the right-hand door.

There were no steps, the door sill being on a level with the street pavement. On the left was a small, four-paned window, breast high, and about twenty-four inches square. This window appeared not to have been cleaned for months, its dirty panes needing no curtain to ensure privacy.

Paul Wreford, as became one of his profession, was a model of patience and deliberation.

His first summons having no effect in arousing attention, he knocked a second, and a third time. Still no result.

It then occurred to him to stroll quietly to the corner of Gwydr Street, along the left side of which ran, for some little distance, the boundary wall of the garden of "The Limes."

Turning smartly but stealthily back, and hugging the house wall, he stole silently up to the little windo .

As he suddenly advanced his face to the dirty glass he was quick enough to see a pair of big, fierce looking eyes glued to the inside, and evidently trying to spy out the cause of the persistent knocking.

The eyes, on being met with those from without, did not remove for a second or two, enabling Wreford to mistily make out the face of a woman and a wealth of fiery red hair. Behind her was the dim glimmer of a flickering candle, which, while it threw the head outline into a certain amount of relief, did nothing towards revealing the interior of the place.

Wreford tapped at the window. As he did so, the light disappeared, and with it the face of the woman.

He tried to recall whether it were young or old, but for the life of him could not.

"I've seen those eyes and that hair together somewhere, surely," he said musingly to himself, as he wa'ked slowly away.

He could only have reached half way to the Gwydr Street corner, when he heard a door slam violently, as if blown to by the wind.

Turning sharply, he saw the figure of an old man (at least, he appeared to be old), bent, and clad in a long, ulster-like garment reaching almost to his feet, move away from the *other door*, and proceed up the street toward the main road.

Wreford, though having no authority to stay the man or otherwise interfere with him, went rapidly after him. By the time, however, he reached the main road, there was not a trace of him.

He was lost in the hurrying throng of passers-by—vanished completely into space.

CHAPTER II.

In a room at the back of "The Limes"—the house in Underwood Road—looking on to the lawn, sat a woman by the open window. It was an old-fashioned "bow," taking up nearly the whole side of the room, and forming an alcove or divan, the very essence of cosiness and comfort.

It was getting dusk, and the few articles of furniture looked ghostly and weird in the gathering gloom.

A large round table stood in the centre, upon it being a motley heap of papers, jewelled nick-nacks of all sorts, and, conspicuously handy, a tiny silver-mounted revolver.

The woman, even in the dim light, was noticeable for her mass of red hair, bound up in Grecian fashion with a large knot high up the back of the head.

Her eyes, too, compelled attention, by reason of the strange, unquiet look in them. Sitting in the twilight, with her chin supported upon her hand, her eyes gazing abstractedly out across the grass to the belt of trees at the bottom of the garden, she seemed as one who saw and heard things unrevealed to all other women.

Presently she broke the silence.

Mr. Henry T. Johnson's new serial starts week after next.

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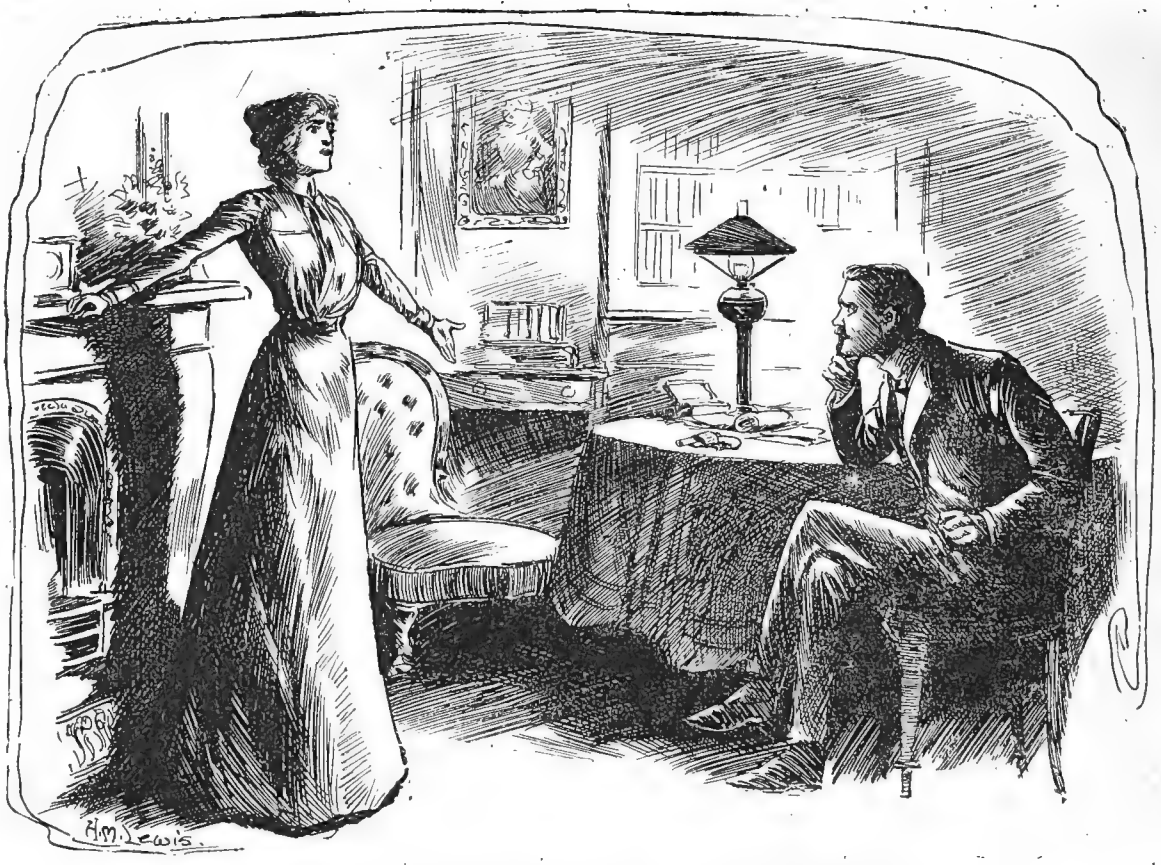

"You cannot? I thought all the world had long since made up its mind as to why I—Eva Tighe—had fled from the face of it."

"Why doesn't he come? Why doesn't he? Oh! he would if he knew!"

At that moment a knock at one of the front doors reverberated through the house.

The whole woman was transformed.

From her attitude of introspective depression she passed in a second to high-wrought, nervous agitation.

With a bound like a tigress she was at the table-side, the tiny revolver in her hand.

Then the knock was repeated.

Straining her ears as if to catch some sound she either looked for or dreaded, she crept noiselessly across the room to the door, which opened into the large square hall.

Right in front of her was the street door—the one, that is, nearest to Gwydr Street. Gliding up to it, she stooped and placed her ear to the letter-slit, listening intently.

Hearing nothing, she moved softly along a passage to her right, half way down which was the *other* street door.

Here, too, being conscious of no sound, or presence even, outside, she returned, and tried to peer out through the before-mentioned little window.

The deliberate heavy tramp of the passing policeman was all that she could hear.

Up to this she had struck no light of any kind.

It was while she was crossing the mat in the hall that she indistinctly saw lying upon it, immediately under the letter-slit, a white something.

Swiftly stooping and seizing it, she carried it tremblingly into the room she had but now left; turned up a lamp with a large dark shade toward the window, and opened a folded sheet of notepaper. It was a letter, hurriedly written in pencil.

"Eva," if ran, "I cannot keep my appointment with you to-night. *There are bloodhounds about.* You will know what I mean.

"Your house is evidently watched, so that whatever precautions you have hitherto taken to avoid recognition will, I fear, soon be useless. Personally, I am at a loss to account for all this hiding away, dear, when, as I believe, there is no need for it. Why will you not be open with me?—with me, who loves you so? When you so suddenly left 'The Hermitage,' immediately after uncle Absalom's funeral, I thought then, and I think now, that you did that which at least was unwise and imprudent. Had you confided more in me, and

Have you claimed that £5 note?

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let me advise and see you, all this horribly unnatural state of things would never have been. Eva! you know that it was only poor uncle's death that interrupted our marriage. Are you going, dear, to make this marriage an impossibility? I will be here to-morrow night at the same time, and, if the coast be clear (though I quite refuse to acknowledge the necessity for it) will knock twice.

"Think over what I have said.

"Your own

"ALEC."

"What have I done? What have I done? Even you, Alec, are against me! Oh! God forgive me! if I wrong you—my own love!—my own love!"

With a cry, bitter with the wrung-out agony of helpless misery, Eva Tighe, letting the bright little weapon she still held drop out of her hand upon the table, sank into a chair, her face buried in her hands, and weeping as though her heart would break.

CHAPTER III.

"EVA," said Alec Hurst, when the terrified girl had feverishly shut-to the door, bolting and barring it with trembling hands, "at last I shall know what it all means. You will have to tell me, for this state of uncertainty and doubt is killing me."

For reply she led him into the same large back room where we first saw her. The window was closed now, a heavy curtain being drawn across it.

"And you live alone in this place, Eva?"

"I live alone in this place."

"But why—why?"

"You surely can divine why!"

"But I cannot!"

She was standing by the empty fireplace, one arm leaning on the marble mantelpiece, while he, in deference to her bidding, sat by the table, waiting for the words which should enlighten him.

"You cannot? I thought all the world had long since made up its mind as to why I, Eva Tighe, had fled from the face of it."

"Then I am not of the world," he said, wondering over her drift; "for the one thing concerning you upon which I have made up my mind is that I love you so that I would take you away—now!—this hour—if it were possible, out of this pernicious atmosphere of doubt and fear to some other country, where you could breathe the pure sweet air of content and happiness."

"Alec," and he fancied he could detect through the intervening shadow upon her face the faintest of sad smiles. "Alec! do you not remember how, when after dear Uncle Absalom died, people looked askance at me?"

"Great heavens! No! What are you driving at, Eva? Are you mad?"

"Sometimes I think, dear, that I am," and her voice sank to a low, sobbing whisper.

"Forgive me!" he cried, springing up, and holding out his hands towards her. "I know not what I said."

"Oh, yes, you did; and—you were right, perhaps. It would be kinder to believe me mad than to know that I sanely could endure such tortures as I do."

"But what do you fear?"

"Alec, ever since my uncle's awful death they have suspected me—sought for me—would take and kill me!"

"They! Who?"

"Those dreadful men! I know that one of them is close to me now. I know that only last night about this time he sought entrance here!"

"Eva! My darling! my promised wife! for pity's sake!—for my sake!—cast from you this dreadful cloud of darkness and despair! When, in my note yesterday, I said that 'bloodhounds were about,' my words had no definite intent or meaning. I did but wish to respect your reason for seclusion, whatever it might be."

"You cannot deceive me, Alec. I know now that you know. It was my last hope that you did not—the last straw to which I clung—your faith and trust in me."

Alec Hurst was a brave man and good; a man, too, whom any woman might have been proud to call husband; a man whose love would be as the one thing needful to a heart sore and empty, and craving that which was truest and best.

Being all this and, indeed, more, he could not, apart from his great love for her, but regard this woman with all that pitiful, protective tenderness her state so manifestly demanded of him.

"Eva," he said, very gently, yet with a firm purpose which she could not mistake, "listen to me. My answer to your terrible story is that I refuse, for one moment, to believe it. Say, rather, that I absolutely refuse to credit any man or woman with so great lack of wisdom and of heart as to put this awful suspicion upon you."

"But, Alec!——"

"Do not interrupt me, dear; I have but little more to say—until to-morrow. Briefly, then, put up all those things that you most value and be ready at nine o'clock to-morrow evening to join me at the main road end of the street, where I shall have a cab waiting."

"I cannot—I cannot!" she moaned.

"I will then drive you," he continued, as not heeding her deprecatory exclamation, "to my mother's. Once there, all will be well for you, and—for me."

He looked at his watch, saw it was getting late, and told her he must go.

As the street door closed behind him, neither of them saw the figure of Paul Wreford standing in the shadow at the corner of Gwydr Street.

Half an hour afterwards, the *other door* opened quietly and the shambling, long-coated figure of an old man slipped out, and, shutting the door carefully, shuffled down the street.

Quick as thought, the detective shot out from his dark retreat and followed.

This time the quarry did not escape.

A heavy hand laid upon the old man's shoulder provoked a piercing shriek that rang through the quiet street.

"Eva Tighe! I arrest you on suspicion of having killed one Absalom Tighe, at 'The Hermitage,' near Edgeware, some time on the night of June 17th of last year."

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Alec Hurst left the house in Underwood Road he had much to do.

Jumping into a hansom, he drove to his chambers in Victoria Street, and without tasting meat or drink wrote at high pressure for more than a hour.

At the end of that time there was a goodly pile of letters lying on his desk. These he himself took out to post, returning at once to his rooms. A slight meal, a glass of wine, and a pipe, and he turned in.

He was up again the next morning soon after six, and

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ordered his breakfast for eight o'clock. It was his usual practice to run through the papers during the meal, this morning being no exception to the rule.

It was a leaded headline in the *Telegraph* that suddenly drove back the blood from his heart and made him sick with apprehensive terror.

"THE EDGEWARE TRAGEDY.

"Arrest of Miss Eva Tighe.

"A startling development of this, well-nigh forgotten case, is the arrest, late last night, by Detective-Sergt. Wreford, of Eva Tighe, niece of the deceased man, on a charge of murder.

"The young lady is quite silent on the subject, refusing indeed, any communication whatever.

"It is expected that at the magisterial examination to-day there will be some highly sensational revelations.

"We hear, on just going to press, that Miss Tighe is completely prostrated, and that the police-court proceedings may, after all, have to be postponed. A curious feature of the arrest is that the prisoner was disguised as a man, wearing also a wig and beard of long grey hair."

Driving like a madman to the family solicitors, Alec quickly put things in train for efficient defence. Then, with the purpose of the night before stronger than ever within him, he made for the old house at Edgeware which still remained empty and unsold.

Arrived—having previously secured the key from the lawyers, who temporarily held them—he entered the deserted place.

It seemed to him like a vault, and as he made his way up the bare oak staircase his footsteps sounded hollow and eerie.

It was not an altogether blind man's search, this upon which he was bent. Wending his way to his late uncle's bedchamber, he carefully tested every panel to see if there was any chance of a hiding-place.

It was not money he was looking for, as all old Absalom's available cash, securities, and so on, had been duly accounted for by the solicitors.

Eva's portion—a not inconsiderable one—was lying waiting for her whenever she should claim it.

It was getting towards evening when Alec's painstaking was at last rewarded.

Close by where the bed had originally stood was a panel in the wainscoting slightly more worn than the others about the edges next to the raised bead.

For some time the young fellow could find no means of moving it; but when he was almost on the point of giving up in despair, his fingers came in contact with a tiny button, and the panel slid creakingly back.

In the black recess were papers without end.

Another hour was spent in going over these by the light of a small hand lantern he had brought with him.

"Thank God!" he at last exclaimed, so loudly that the mice behind the wainscot squeaked and scampered again.

It was but a folded sheet of ordinary notepaper.

"I have nothing to live for. As did my father before me, so have I decided to do. I write this in the event of trouble arising to anyone through this my act. I die without regret. Eva will be the better for my death. She will marry Alec Hurst, and soon forget

"Absalom Tighe."

That night, late, an excited, unreasonable man knocked up the senior partner of Parker, Hyde and Co., who, in his turn, paid a late visit to the magistrate who, in the natural course of things, would hear the case on the morrow.

An appeal, then, to a still higher authority speedily procured poor Eva's release; the only dissatisfied person being Detective-Sergeant Wreford, whose knuckles were duly and somewhat sharply rapped by his superior in that he had exceeded his duty and brought disgrace upon his, Mr .Superintendent Hastie's, district administration.

* * * * *

Mr. and Mrs. Alec Hurst are, it is believed, in permanent residence now somewhere in California, in which delightful State they have an ideal home.

* * * * *

The house in Underwood Street, Kensington, is "To Let."

Ralph Enderby.

HIS ONE LOVE DREAM.

It lasted nearly one day, and he thinks he escaped very easily.

Nine o'clock of a lovely April morning, with the air breathing soft scents of budding grass and early spring violets, while overhead the blue sky stretched its dazzling dome, like an arch of glittering sapphire.

"It's spring in good earnest," said Mr. Petro Peterson, as he sat at his window, his heels poised on the extreme outer ledge, and a fragrant cigar perfuming the surrounding atmosphere. "Heigho! I can almost fancy how the dandelions are starring over the hills of the old New Hampshire farm where I was born. Who would think that it was the 26th of April already? And my house not let. What can the real estate agents be thinking of?"

Mr. Petro Peterson was a stout, bald-headed gentleman of some six-and-forty years of age, with bright hazel eyes, and a neat, compact little figure—one of those men whose very air and gait, even though they were never to speak a word, make the perpetual proclamation: "I am a man of money and position!"

"I don't see why Mrs. Parker wanted to give up the house," went on Mr. Peterson, in his unsyllabled soliloquy. "She says it's because the price of board is falling, and she can't afford to keep up the establishment! A great mistake of hers in my opinion—a great mistake! She's the only woman I ever knew who could make a real French omelet, or knew what *café noir* meant! I'm almost tempted to wish—almost I say—that I had married some nice, sensible little girl twenty good years ago; for—dear me, what can all that ringing at the bell mean? Why don't Mrs. Parker answer it?

Look at page 432.

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Do the people mean to pull the wire out bodily, I wonder?"

He had just tossed his cigar out of the window, with the intention of himself hastening to the rescue, when a servant girl came up to his apartment, breathless and eager..

"What is it, Hannah?" he cried irascibly.

"If ye please, sir, the mistress is gone to market, and there's no one to show the house. I told 'em would they call again, but they said perhaps Mr. Peterson would oblige 'em!"

"Very cool of 'em, upon my word!" cried Mr. Peterson, mentally execrating the whole race of house hunters.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Peterson," cried a voice as soft and sprightly as the notes of the bluebird, "but mamma and I have so many places to go to, and we thought you wouldn't mind our seeing the house!"

And Mr. Peterson's wrath melted away like a morning vapour before her pretty insolence of demeanour, as she stood in the doorway, balancing a fairy parasol on her finger, and looking with saucy artlessness round his bachelor sanctum, while Mrs. Cope's matronly countenance appeared in the background.

"You can allow us the privilege of looking at your house," said Jeannie coaxingly. "I—that is, mamma has got to move, and although the rent of this house, must, of course, be very high, she thought, by taking a few boarders she might contrive to meet expenses!"

"Exactly so," said mild Mrs. Cope.

"Are you going to move elsewhere?" asked Jeannie of our hero, as she glanced at the half-packed trunks.

"My landlady is," groaned Mr. Petro Peterson. "It's awful to be at the mercy of a landlady, Miss Cope!"

"But it's all your fault!"

"All my fault?"

"To be sure—why didn't you get married?"

"Because I was a fool!"

"And why don't you get married now?" pursued the relentless little sprite.

"Would you," questioned Mr. Peterson gravely, "if you were I?"

"Of course I would. Get married and board with us. Mamma will give you this room, and——"

"My dear!" checked Mrs. Cope gently.

"My dear madam!" cried Mr. Peterson, still with his eyes fixed on Jeannie's lovely face, "I assure you I think it is an excellent idea!"

And all through their journey from cellar to French roof, while Mrs. Cope considered the relative advantages of this room and that, Mr. Peterson kept revolving this same "excellent idea" in his mind.

"Miss Jeannie," he said, somewhat awkwardly, as they turned downstairs, "supposing I should—ahem—adopt your suggestion, what would be your fancy in furnishing a suite of rooms?"

"Let me see," said Jeannie, looking composedly around, "I'd paper the room in white and gold, and I'd fill the windows with canary birds and plants, and I'd have a blue carpet and blue silk chairs and sofas."

"Mrs. Cope, if you should decide to take the house, you will please reserve these rooms for me, and—and Mrs. Peterson, ma'am, at ten pounds a week."

"I shall be very happy, sir!" said Mrs. Cope. "Jeannie, stop laughing; you behave exactly like a little school-girl. You will give me till to-morrow morning, sir, to decide?"

"Certainly, ma'am—certainly."

As he turned, after seeing them off, already in imagination leading Jeannie Cope to the flower-decked altar, a slender, good-looking young man of some four or five and twenty stood beside him.

"Good morning, uncle," he cried breathlessly.

"Good morning, Joe," returned Mr. Peterson, nodding to Mr. Joseph Franklin, his only nephew. "What brings you here in such a hurry?"

"Is your house let yet, uncle?"

"Yes—no—I don't exactly know," responded Mr. Peterson, a little awkwardly. "What does it matter to you whether it is or not, hey, you young scapegrace?"

"Much, sir. To tell you the truth, I was thinking of renting it myself."

"You!"

"Yes, I. I'm going to be married next week, uncle."

"A very sensible plan," said Mr. Peterson beamingly.

"I'm glad you approve of it, sir, and, in case my wife and I conclude to take a few boarders, can I have your promise to consider you as one?"

"That is, in case you take the house?"

"Yes."

"I can't promise; in fact, I think I've already engaged myself," said Mr. Peterson, importantly. "To speak frankly, Joe, I've some idea of marrying myself."

"You, uncle?" exclaimed Franklin, in amazement.

"And why not?"

"There's no reason on earth why you shouldn't uncle," responded Joe, smothering a laugh; "only, you see, you took me rather by surprise. In that case, why shouldn't we have the pleasure of accommodating both Mrs. Peterson and yourself?"

"Because, sir," said Mr. Peterson sententiously, "because my mother-in-law that is to be takes boarders, sir—a few boarders in a genteel sort of way, and I've all but promised myself to her."

"And if you should make no other arrangement you will let us have the house?"

"Y—yes, I suppose so."

"There can be no harm in my bringing her to look at the house this afternoon after office hours?"

"No, I suppose not."

He was making a little pencil estimate about the probable cost of refurnishing the apartments he occupied with velvet and satin, according to Jeannie's not particular economical ideas, that same afternoon, when Joseph Franklin entered, flushed and proud.

"Uncle," said Joe proudly, "this is my promised wife. Jeannie, this is Uncle Petro Peterson."

"Jeannie Cope!" gasped the astonished bachelor.

"You'll give me a kiss, uncle, won't you?" said Jeannie, putting up her coral lips in the most bewitching way in the world. "I said it was mamma this morning; but it was really Joe and I that wanted the house."

"It was, eh?" said Mr. Peterson, with a curious commingling of sensations.

"Yes, and you know you promised to get married and board with us. He did, indeed, Joe."

"I was only joking. Married, indeed,! I'm not such a fool yet. I'll stay here, but I'll not refurnish the rooms this year."

So the bill was taken off the front door; and Mrs. Joseph Franklin has learned to make an omelet that suits the fastidious taste of her uncle-in law.

"And it's just as well that Fate saved me from making a fool of myself," says Mr. Peterson exultantly.

Mr. Henry T. Johnson's new serial starts week after next.

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The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

CHAPTER XLI. (*continued*).

"I DON'T want nothing for what I've done," she declared; "I was sorry for the kid—a real good 'un, he were, and a perfect gentleman, though a mere baby, as you may say. But I ought to tell you as she called him Jack, and clumped him when he told her it wasn't his name. Tell me who he really was, won't you, sir?"

Felix shuddered to think of the cruelties at which the servant-girl hinted. "His Christian name was Brian," he said; "just now I must not reveal his surname—you shall learn it some day. For the rest I want you to do me another service—and that is to direct me to a second-hand clothier's. I must cover up my tweeds and riding boots or I shall be guyed in the East End, as if I were a Punch and Judy show. While I buy a long overcoat, I'll get you to keep an eye on my prisoner, she musn't escape till I know where to pick her up again."

He had stooped and was taking off his spurs as he spoke—it was the one safe occasion on which he had remembered their existence.

"There's a place round the end of the next street," said Louisa; "I'll sing out to the cabby." And she thrust herself bodily through the window, to shout a few sentences in her broad Cockney. The vehicle swerved, turned at a sharp angle, and increased its speed, to halt before a tiny establishment, one of the few still lighted in the depressing quarter they were penetrating. It was a Jewish slop-shop.

Felix descended, went in, and purchased a soiled Newmarket of fawn cloth; it reached, as he donned it, nearly to his heels. When he regained the four-wheeler, the baby-farmer was still slumbering, Louisa sitting sentinel.

"I'm off now," she decided; "I must scoot back, or I'll get the sack, without any wages. 'So-long' and good-luck sir." And, nodding cheerfully, the little servant vanished in the gloom.

Felix ordered the puzzled driver to proceed, and re-entered the cab. The old crone, huddled on the front seat, apparently slept. Felix permitted her to snore until they drew towards the end of their journey. As they passed into Whitechapel-road, the quarter to midnight chimed out from an adjacent church-tower, and Felix, touching, with a certain reluctance, the grimy form of his companion, wakened her by force.

She stiffened herself and stared wildly around—there was no doubt she had been genuinely in the arms of Morpheus. "Who are you," she faltered; "and where am I?"

Her escort pointed out of the window. "I promised your friends to see you home," he answered; "as you may perceive, you are on the way thither."

Mrs. Dobson blinked at him. "You take a mighty interest in me," she snapped.

For reply, Felix produced the sovereign he had uselessly offered to Louisa. He struck a vesta and held up both the light and the coin. The sunken eyes of the baby-farmer gleamed.

"This child you were given," he said; "it had reddish hair, had it not?"

The other snatched at the piece of money. "It had," she owned, with her cackling laugh; "but the red was dye—they couldn't trick me in that way He-he!"

A further golden coin was shown her in the glow of a flaming vesta.

"You got rid of the child to go abroad?" he said; "now tell me exactly all the circumstances of that bargain and I will pay you five more of these."

"He-he," quavered the old crone; "a fool and his money are soon parted. Well, if you'll buy, I'll sell!"

The baby-farmer was interrupted by the halting of the cab—they had attained their destination. Mrs. Dobson tottered to her feet.

"Come in," she said; "and you shall learn what you want to know. And I'll not have you robbed or murdered, because you're a gentleman. I can hear it in your voice, the sort of voice I haven't heard for sixty years, when I was a pretty girl in the country and had many a soft word from the quality sparks."

Felix dismissed the cab and followed the baby-farmer into her mean abode. She preceded him into the wretched kitchen and put a match to a candle-end. Upon the visitor's gaze there burst the squalid horrors of the place, the damp, foul floor, the filthy infants, drowsing in the heavy torpor of exhaustion the crawling vermin, the shattered panes that gaped to the autumn night.

The baby-farmer stamped out the remains of the match and approached him unsteadily.

"He-he," she said; "it's a queer tale, and worth the money. In all my old life I never saw the like. I was paid to hold my tongue, which was always providing I wasn't paid to wag it. So you shall be the wiser and I the richer. He-he!"

She rested a skinny hand on the back of a damaged chair and began to whisper. The candle-end spat and guttered and Felix Dering listened—amazedly.

CHAPTER XLII.

MR. BRASHER GOES ON THE WAR-PATH.

"I DO not expect you to assume for me a love you do not yet feel. But there is a difference between a slight lack of enthusiasm and a frigidity which verges on the statuesque. Your demeanour is not flattering to your future husband, Esther."

Have you claimed that £5 note?

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And Otto Hare, with a sudden scowl and a tempestuous outburst of passion, lashed at the trotting roans. They broke into a wild gallop.

Esther Carew shivered, not so much at the spurt of terrifying speed or at the Golden Dwarf's vicious display of temper, as at the sound of her name upon his lips.

Otto Hare dragged the cobs into their trot again, and put by the whip. "I do not know, Esther," he went on, "whether you have actually given Dering an explicit dismissal. If not, it would be as well to do so. He must leave Wyresdale, that is flat; his presence here can only be disturbing to you and irritating to me."

The girl beside the Golden Dwarf knitted her gloved hands. "I—I have not seen Felix—Mr. Dering—for some time," she faltered, "and I—I only promised to—to marry you yesterday. But I could not face him now; I dare not tell him I have been false to him, even though it was for his own sake."

Otto Hare sneered. "Have the goodness not to remind me," he requested, "of your absurd interest in Dering. Otherwise I may cancel the bargain you view so ungraciously, and, instead, pursue a policy of revenge. In that case I shall effectively deprive you of Dering, and you will receive a gratifying public sympathy as the romantic maiden who loved the notorious Wyresdale murderer."

Esther's delicate fingers gripped one another in a desperate effort at self-control. "You—you are horribly cruel!" she stammered.

The Golden Dwarf laid a tiny palm upon her arm, grasping it like a vice. "I could kill you," he muttered, "when you mention Dering—kill you myself by lingering degrees. Esther, I love you to distraction, and the measure of my love is the measure of my jealousy. To win you I have had to make a certain agreement with you: did you not love Dering and desire his safety above all things you would not have consented to marry me. If you wish me to observe our contract teach me to forget that it was ever made. Were you a fraction less beautiful, I would kill you—first—and revenge myself on Dering afterwards."

His small features glared distortedly into hers, she felt his hot breath upon her cheek, and shrank from him, recognising that in the Golden Dwarf's diminutive body two awful emotions struggled for the mastery, and that on the issue of this struggle hung the fate of Felix Dering. She fought for the power to bend her proud spirit—since her lover was in danger—and a weak smile crossed her pale countenance.

"I suppose I must be glad, then, that I am presentable," she said, attempting a jest.

Otto Hare looked at her, a gleam of madness in his contracted pupils. "How lovely you are!" he exclaimed; "if you would smile upon me oftener you could mould me to your will, whatever it might be."

Esther trembled at the extravagance of the sentiment that spoke in his accent. "I—I have only one wish just now," she replied, "and that is to be taken home. Your horses go so fast, they frighten me."

The Golden Dwarf drew rein immediately, and the cobs relapsed into a walk. "See," he declared, "how they obey your least command; they and all I have are yours. Which reminds me—your mother says you have not ridden the mare I gave you. Believe me, she is worthy of a better destiny than your old groom's exercise canters. One of these days I will ride down to the Rosery and you shall go for a gallop with me."

He shook up the roans as he made this promise and turned their heads towards the white villa. "If I have seemed a trifle harsh this afternoon, Esther," he said patronisingly, "I trust it is for the last time." He patted her soft fingers with his whip-hand. "We shall be very happy, Esther," he added, "when we are man and wife. You will spend thousands where other women spend hundreds; you will have the finest horses, the smartest dresses, the most luxurious establishments, and, on the whole, the most devoted of husbands."

With this prophecy he checked the roans at the Rosery gate and alighted in order that he might help her to descend. Then, opening the wicket for her, he watched her go up the gravel path and waved an adieu as she disappeared into the hall.

Esther heard the rattle of the phaeton wheels die away before she stole, numbed and dizzy, into the drawing-room. Someone advanced to meet her, someone tall and stalwart, with a quiet yet affectionate gravity. The someone was Felix Dering.

"At last," he said, almost gaily, "you see me again under your own roof. Barbara told me, though, I admit with reluctance and a spice of mystery, that you were out driving, and I insisted on waiting. Esther, the shadow begins to lift. I have great news for you."

Esther gave a sharp cry and retreated. "Don't come near me," she whispered, "you'll hate me when you know what I have done. I'm not yours any longer. I—I am to be married to Mr. Hare."

Felix staggered. "Esther," he cried, "what magic have they used to make you yield? Did I not urge you to believe nothing you were told; did I not write to you that I was on the track of the real mystery of my uncle's death. Did I not bid you be hopeful, since the darkest hour was over, and the dawn in sight?"

Esther sank into a seat. "I could not hope," she sobbed; "Mr. Hare brought a man here who assured me he had seen you in Wyresdale that night in July at the cross-roads. Mr. Hare gave me the choice between marrying him and allowing Mr. Garland to go to Inspector Brasher. Mr. Garland, he said, would keep or reveal your secret as he wished. I could not let you be ruined. Everyone would think you guilty, after you permitted them to believe you were in Duchester all the while."

Her lover was staring at her, astounded. "So that was Garland's purpose in calling here," exclaimed Felix Dering; "good heavens, now I understand all. He was Kraft's tool in a double sense, but for the same object—to separate us. Esther, my darling, your sacrifice is to no end and shall not be consummated. I would save you not only at the cost of my reputation, but my life, if need be. Yet neither is necessary. At length I can prove my innocence—Esther, I have discovered how my uncle died, and who killed him."

Incredulous of her own ears, Esther sprang up. But there was no mistaking the sober self-possession of her lover's face. He carried his shoulders well back and his head was borne proudly—she perceived in every lineament the consciousness of freedom and security. As he flung his arms about her she sank into them and pillowed her fair curls upon his breast. A great peace filled their hearts, so loyal and so long-suffering.

A sudden peal at the door-bell of the Rosery interrupted them. Barbara's feet hurried through the little hall outside and they heard her voice in colloquy with the visitor. There was a heavy step on the threshold, the latch whined, and Michael Brasher strode into the drawing-room. The lovers had moved apart at the first intimation of a call, and Mr. Brasher, stalking deliberately between them, cleared his throat.

"I arrest you, Felix Dering," he proclaimed, "on the charge of procuring the abduction of your cousin, Sir Brian Dering—a child under the age of fourteen years—and also with aiding and abetting in the said abduction. It is my duty to warn you that anything you say may be taken down and used in evidence against you. I have a cab in readiness," added Mr. Brasher, subsiding into his usual manner, "so if you will come quietly, there need be no fuss for the present."

He made a peremptory motion and a couple of con-

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stables, who had posted themselves at the entrance of the apartment, stepped forward. Barbara had darted to Esther's side immediately upon the disclosure of Michael Brasher's mission. But Esther was gazing, in an agony of apprehension, at Felix Dering.

A half smile played about Felix's mouth. "Very well, Inspector," he said, "I suppose I must consider myself your prisoner. I am afraid, however, that this is not one of your lucky cases. You are on the wrong scent again." He turned to Esther and his unruffled bearing comforted her, despite the abruptness of this new and crushing blow. "Adieu for an hour or two, dear," he murmured, reassuringly, "till I convince the worthy Mr. Brasher he was not born for a detective."

He took up his hat, nodded to her cheerfully, and fell into line with his escort in blue. Michael Brasher marched his men and their captive out to the Rosery gate, installed them in a fly, gained it himself, and was rattled off, the incarnation of official calm, towards Wyresdale police depôt.

Once Felix, tickled at the Inspector's stern reserve, asked a question, "May I know," he inquired, "the immediate reason for this action."

Mr. Brasher shook his head. "I'm not at liberty to give you any information," he said briefly; "you cannot be brought before the magistrates until to-morrow, so you may be sent to Duchester over this evening. I have wired for instructions, but you can communicate with a solicitor, if you wish."

Felix laughed. "No more trusting the strong-room after Spencer's escape?" he queried. Michael Brasher blushed and was silent.

Reaching the police-station, Felix was guarded into the office, the charge formally booked, and the accused searched. Then Mr. Brasher glanced about him uneasily.

"There's a drunk and disorderly case in the cell," he said: "I'll make you comfortable in my private room if you'll let me slip a pair of irons on; you'll be less public so, till the reply comes from Duchester."

The prisoner held out his wrists and the steel bracelets snapped upon them. He was marshalled into the indicated chamber and a constable lit a gas bracket—for the autumn day was beginning to close in. As an afterthought, Inspector Brasher opened the hand-cuffs, readjusted them through the stout arm of a wooden chair, and Felix Dering was fairly hobbled.

"Can I wire for any lawyer?" inquired Michael Brasher, as he prepared to leave.

"No, thank you," answered Felix: "my solicitors are a Duchester firm, and if I am to go there I can send to them later. It will prevent a double journey and possibly confusion."

"As you choose," retorted the Inspector and went out, locking his important captive securely in.

Hardly had the lock clicked than there came a tapping at a door, which, to all appearances, divided the room from another and neighbouring one. It was a singular, impatient summons, and it was followed by a cautious whisper.

"Is that you, Felix Dering?" said a woman's voice, thin and piercing; "it is Judith Garland who speaks to you."

Felix twitched himself close to the door whence the question emanated. "I am Felix Dering," he responded, "and alone. Why on earth are you near me?"

"I also am arrested," replied the voice. "Neal has turned informer—they must have got on his track, somehow. At least so I conclude from what I wheedled out of the fool Brasher. He told me guardedly, 'Your brother has made a certain confession and your other accomplice will be in custody in half an hour.' When I heard you speak to Brasher a moment ago I guessed everything."

The listener drew a deep breath—in a flash he comprehended the purport of the letter that Neal had written and of his mysterious merriment over it. By now Mrs. Schwartz and her lodger were out of England, and a skilful plan to revenge himself upon Judith (doubtless for the supposed "blabbing," which had so excited his anger) had been put into effect. He started from his meditation; Judith was whispering again.

"I was not able—for my own sake—to destroy the cheque you had made out for Neal, and which I have kept with a purpose. Brasher has it—Neal must have put him on the scent of it. It will go against both of us. You see, Felix Dering," she continued, "I make you smart at last, even in my defeat I drag you down. If Neal has not given you away over your uncle's death I will—I still have the bloodstained links. How your pretty Esther will enjoy her notoriety and your ruin!"

Felix recoiled from the barrier through which penetrated the vindictive sentences. As he did so the door at his back was unlocked and pushed wide. Michael Brasher entered—an embarrassed expression on his bearded lips. He crossed to his prisoner and unfastened the hand-cuffs.

"Will you please come this way, Mr. Dering?" he said, and his accent was both nervous and respectful. Surprised at the 'Mr.' and the change in Mr. Brasher's demeanour, Felix rose and followed him into the outer office.

A thrill of amazement struck him. Sitting in the sergeant's chair at the charge-desk—rather weak and wan—was Edward Spencer, the missing groom accused of Sir Christopher Dering's murder. Near him stood Archibald Geddes, in his shirt-sleeves, and carrying a bundle composed chiefly of his own coat. From an extremity of this bundle projected a childish head, parti-coloured gold and auburn. And the wasted cheeks and delicate brow beneath the strangely-hued locks were those of—Brian Dering.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"What's Become of Kraft?"

"Spencer, Brian, Geddes!" gasped Felix Dering, as he stared incredulously at the trio before him: "what does it all mean?"

Archibald Geddes settled the tiny baronet upon his bosom and withdrew a flap of the coat in which the child was enveloped. Brian Dering's face was pinched and withered—he seemed, while retaining his infantile stature, to have grown years older. Also the astounded observers were able to perceive—for his little body was devoid of any other clothing than the Scotchman's impromptu wrap—that Brian Dering's limbs were as shrunken as his countenance. The pupils of his delicate blue orbs were widely dilated, yet he appeared to be in a species of waking slumber; no gleam of recognition illuminated his features as he glanced wearily at Felix.

The chemist's assistant pointed to one frail forearm—it was pitted by minute holes, several of which showed still sore and inflamed. They were the scars left by the needle of a hypodermic syringe.

"The child is under the influence of cocaine," said Geddes: "he is not properly conscious." And, with a touch as gentle as a woman's, the Scotchman refolded the coat about his burden. "Don't be alarmed at the look of his hair," added Archibald Geddes: "it has simply been dyed and is regaining its own colour in patches."

"How in heaven's name!" cried Felix, "did you discover him—and where? And why have you, Spencer, chosen this, of all moments, to return to Wyresdale?"

Edward Spencer answered faintly—a wan smile flickering across his now thickly bearded mouth. "I haven't been away from Wyresdale, Mr. Felix," he declared: "though I didn't know that for certain till Mr. Geddes

Look at page 482.

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got me out and gave me a glimpse of the dear old place again."

"But you escaped from the cell here," persisted Felix; "did you meet with an accident and get laid up?"

"Twern't no escape of mine, sir," responded the groom; "I dropped asleep in Mr. Brasher's lock-up and woke to find myself in another half as big and twice as strong. Not that there was a window in it—I've seen nowt but electric light for two months. And, though I never dreamed it, little Sir Brian has been my neighbour for long enough. Curse them as blighted his sweet body."

Felix Dering passed his hand over his brow—his brain reeled. Geddes touched him on the shoulder.

"You'll understand all in a few moments, sir," was the Scotchman's comment, "and, indeed, we've no time to lose. Mr. Brasher, if I can lay this poor child down and substitute some other wrap for my coat, I'll take you off immediately."

"The sergeant's wife is a good motherly soul," said Michael Brasher; "will you carry him through to her, Mr. Geddes?"

The Inspector spoke with deference—evidently he had abandoned his cherished conviction that Mr. Geddes was a person of unsound mind.

Archibald Geddes acted on the suggestion and came back alone, donning his jacket as he walked. Mr. Brasher had moved from Felix Dering's side to deliver a series of rapid instructions to a subordinate. As a result of these a couple of constables tramped heavily into the room.

"You'll stop where you are, Spencer," Geddes told his remaining patient; "you're not fit to stir. But if Mr. Dering can be allowed out without bail, now that he has been formally charged, it might be as well, Mr. Brasher."

Michael Brasher blushed. "In view of Sir Brian's reappearance," he said stiffly, "I will take it upon myself to withdraw the charge—I acted purely on my own initiative and in respect of the gravest possible information; I did not ask for a warrant."

"So that Mr. Dering has the right to sue you for false arrest and imprisonment," supplemented the Scotchman, cruelly. Mr. Brasher winced.

"In such an event, Mr. Geddes," he responded; "I should have to contend that your discoveries do not necessarily vindicate Mr. Dering from a charge brought against him by an alleged confederate. But, for the present, we will postpone discussion of the matter. I have arranged for an escort to accompany us—are you ready?"

"Quite," said the chemist's assistant and led the way out of the police-station into the early September evening. The party of four followed him, to proceed, by shadowy ways, in the direction of the cross-roads. Arrived there, they scaled, at the Scotchman's request, the brick wall of Wyresdale Park and threaded its plantations towards the tower in which, twenty odd hours earlier, Archibald Geddes had been conveyed by force.

An occasional deep bark warned them that the great dogs ran loose according to their nightly wont, but, unlike Geddes on his prevous visit, they got through unmolested by the canine guardians of the place. Felix Dering moved thoughtfully, yet as one who was not surprised either at the route or their destination. Geddes was talking confidentially to the Inspector.

Ascending the smooth green slope, the quartette halted by the low door in the bottom of the tower. The Scotchman tried it—to find it locked.

"The dickens!" he muttered; "and I left it ajar—we must breek it in."

"Not without a search-warrant," objected Michael Brasher, "you forget my position, Mr. Geddes."

"Deuce take your position," growled Geddes; "will you spoil all for a legal scruple?" And he flung his powerful frame against the barrier. His attack was futile—the steel fastenings of the door held obstinately.

"Be on your guard," whispered Felix; "someone is coming. Kraft it may be—the figure is too tall for Hare."

Geddes glanced at the speaker curiously, as if to ask what he knew of the German or his patron, to prompt the caution. Then, obeying a murmured command of the Inspector's, the quintette dodged into the angle formed by the tower and the wall of its flanking structure.

The vague shape stole nearer through the gloom, displaying much vigilance. Reassured by the dusk and the stillness, it approached the door, produced a stout key, and undid the portal. The new-comer was Zorn, that lean, dark Prussian whom Esther Carew had seen in the telescope-room the day of the garden-party.

As the hinges whined, the Inspector made a rush—his men at his heels. Felix Dering and Archibald Geddes sprang after, and the Prussian, clutched, over-weighted, borne down, was a prisoner.

Felix closed the tower-door behind them and struck a match. In front was a second entrance, giving access to a lighted chamber of considerable dimensions. They dragged their captive through, throttling him into silence as they went.

The five explorers found themselves in a round cellar-like apartment—the ground floor of the tower. In it throbbed and spun a huge gas-engine, driving monotonously a pair of large dynamos. The regular hollow "cough" of the former and the tremor of its strokes were responsible for the singular vibration which had so puzzled Archibald Geddes.

Hard by the dynamos there descended, from the upper floor, a spiral iron staircase. Its last steps seemed to be built into the concrete pavement of the chamber.

Geddes wrinkled his brows. "I left that open also," he said; "Mr. Brasher, something has happened since my escape, the way to my prison lies there, and some other hand than mine has closed it." He indicated the base of the spiral staircase. "Help me to pull this aside," he added; "the lower portion is on a swivel."

Leaving their captive to the care of two constables, Mr. Brasher lent a mighty support to the efforts of Felix Dering and the Scotchman. The device creeked and yielding, to swing bodily away, bringing a stone slab that uncovered a square aperture beneath. From the aperture sloped a flight of straight, rock-hewn steps.

"Now, Mr. Brasher," pursued Archibald Geddes, "if you think we can trust our friend here—whom I conclude to be one of Dr. Kraft's compatriots—in custody of your men, I will reveal to you the mysteries of Wyresdale Park."

For answer, Michael Brasher dived into his hip-pocket, fished up the identical brace of hand-cuffs that had ornamented Felix Dering's wrists, snapped them on the Prussian's, and, with a word to the constables who had held him, slid through the trap in the floor. Felix and Geddes were already disappearing down it.

At the bottom of the steps, in the side of the short well, was a door, bolted exteriorly. The Scotchman negotiated the fastenings and passed in. The three entered the dark corridor, athwart whose obscurity still fell the beams of coloured light.

"You might strike another match, Mr. Dering," remarked the chemist's assistant; "I used all mine an hour ago for the same purpose." Felix ignited a vesta and held it up.

"In here," said Geddes, pausing near the first of the small bolted portals on his right, "is Dr. Kraft—armed with a revolver. You see that hole in the wood of the door, it is where he let fly at me as I fastened him in."

The Inspector strode forward. "I am responsible for these proceedings," announced Mr. Brasher; "I will

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encounter any risk there may be." And so saying, he grasped the bolt, to draw it.

Geddes favoured his rival with a look of unequivocal admiration, but joined him, almost defiantly. It was as if he shrank from yielding to Michael Brasher the undivided honours of the danger.

Click! The iron rods shot back and the door swung open. Geddes and Brasher thrust into the crimson glare that streamed forth. They recoiled amazed—the cell was empty!

Archibald Geddes swore—not loud but deep. "Tricked!" he cried, "tricked; the scoundrel has got off. There must be a secret way out. Those bolts were fast enough when I left."

Mr. Brasher began methodically to sound the walls and the floor—both rang dull and solid. Felix was gazing at the red lamp, the bare rock-hewn compartment, the shallow metal trough—lined with cotton-wool—in a corner. He noticed the elaborate system of ventilation, the artificially high temperature of the cell.

"What is the explanation of this mysterious recess?" he demanded, addressing himself to Geddes.

The Scotchman relinquished his share in the search for a concealed exit. "Come further on," was his response, "and I will satisfy you."

With which promise, he strode out of the cell and unbolted the door of the next. A red glow met them, but of a tint less intense than that they had previously experienced.

The second compartment was as bare as the other, and had the same long metal trough, piled with cotton-wool, at its extremity. From this receptacle there started, when they passed into the cramped place, a thin form, unclothed, stooping, yet tall as that of a well-grown man. But its eyes were vacant and its face had the tremulous childishness of an infant.

The creature cowered again into its cotton bed as they advanced, fumbling with its skinny fists about its features as a frightened nursling will do.

"Good heavens!" cried Michael Brasher; "is it an idiot?"

Geddes shook his head. "Only so far as lack of education and human society will make idiots," he answered. "It is a boy, doubtless, despite its appearance, of tender age, and forced to this stature by the operation, presumably, of that infernal light. There were four degrees of colour, you would observe, in the rays from the keyholes—which, luckily for my explorations, Kraft had superseded by bolts—so I suppose his subjects are inured to the lights by instalments. He has two more of these embryo giants under lesser intensities of red illumination. All are as good as blind—thanks to the effect of the colour upon the retina."

"But the room in which you secured Kraft," said Mr. Brasher; "the room in which you yourself were confined—that had a red light and no tenant such as this."

"Possibly Kraft had lost one of his involuntary patients," hazarded the chemist's assistant; "there are, however, four red compartments in all, and two more are occupied."

"But the blue lights," said Felix, surveying the huddled figure in the shallow cradle, so cold-bloodedly scientific in its hygenic simplicity.

"You shall see," replied Geddes, returning to the threshold. He piloted them a pace or two down the corridor, and unfastened a third cell.

A profound azure radiance filled the compartment. The Scotchman entered it, crossed to a smaller cradle than they had seen before, and lifted from the cotton-wool bed a little being, some twenty inches in height. It was a miniature of humanity, for its stature sturdy and robust. As Geddes set it on its tiny limbs it regarded the visitors fearlessly.

"Here," continued the Scotchman, "you have an example of the Doctor's skill in stunting. Illegal as his experiments are, he is apparently on the road to the production of both giants and dwarfs. There are three more subjects under the blue lights and all are midgets. I suppose it was Mr. Hare's own affliction that led him to patronise these morbid inquiries."

"Are they English children?" asked Felix, thoughtfully.

"No," said Geddes; "Asiatics of some sort, and either they have remained dumb by reason of their captivity, or—to allow of their transit from abroad—their vocal chords have been extirpated, for they make no noise whatever."

"Heavens," put in the Inspector; "you don't mean that Sir Brian Dering has been rendered permanently speechless?"

"He has been sufficiently fortunate," admitted the chemists' assistant, "to be spared that, for he was muttering deliriously when I rescued him. Otherwise he has suffered terribly, unlike Dr. Kraft's trio of midgets, who must have been introduced to his methods very young. I found him in a cell with a blue illumination. Doubtless Kraft wished to ascertain the effect of his treatment upon a maturer and more cultivated child. Part of the dwarfing process evidently consists of injecting cocaine—Sir Brian was plainly under the influence of some narcotic which, as cocaine does, had dilated his pupils. And I noticed an empty cocaine bottle with our label in a store-cell at the end of the corridor—in which cell, by the bye, there is a larder and a cooking-stove, so that the laboratory has been equipped to be complete in itself. No wonder; Dr. Kraft could scarcely afford to draw attention to the peculiar nature of his researches."

"Then it was for these purposes that they kidnapped Sir Brian?" inquired Michael Brasher.

"So it seems," allowed the Scotchman; "but what beats me is why Spencer should have been stowed away here. He says Kraft has never tried any experiments on him, and has fed him, at least adequately. Yet it must have been Kraft who carried him off from the strong-room—impossible as the feat seems. What was Kraft's motive?"

Felix Dering interrupted the colloquy of his companions. "Spencer apart," he told them, "you are wrong about Brian. Dr. Kraft did not know it was my little cousin he was experimenting upon."

Archibald Geddes gasped. "How can you be sure of that, sir?" he asked.

"From the facts of the case," said Felix; "you followed one line of investigation, I followed another—each of us learned half the story. At some more convenient time we must put the halves together. Now our duty is to recapture Kraft and his villainous collaborator, Hare."

There was a call from the rear of the corridor—one of the constables left behind was summoning them. The Inspector went back with his allies.

"The man we've got upstairs, sir," reported the policeman, "wants to speak to you immediately. He says he can give you valuable information, which must be acted on at once if it is to be of any use."

Michael Brasher dived through the doorway and hurried up the steps with alacrity. Felix and Geddes pursued him, and the constable formed the tail of the short procession. When they arrived in the engine-room it was to behold the Prussian waving Mr. Brasher away.

"I don't want policemen," he intimated, disdainfully. "I want a gentleman. You, sir," he told Felix, "if I, who am a trifle less black than my associates, aid you to capture them—nay, to convict them of crimes you could not prove without me—how will that help me before the law?"

Have you claimed that £5 note?

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Felix Dering shrugged his shoulders. "To the traitor," he retorted; "the law is often lenient, for its own purposes. It uses, if it cannot respect him."

"*So*," observed the Prussian; "well, I can't do myself any harm and I may profit in the end. This, then, is my news. Dr. Kraft—whom I myself released, twenty minutes ago, from the durance in which you put him—and Mr. Otto Hare are to join me here before leaving for the Continent. They are now due any moment and if you dispose yourself artistically you will catch them at your ease. When they are captured I will sell you some more information about them on terms more definitely satisfactory to your humble servant, Johann Zorn."

Mr. Brasher scratched his head. "We ought to hide," he said, "that is, if Dr. Kraft has a key of his own to come in with, for I need scarcely say we should not trust you to open for him. But where is there a suitable place to pounce on them from?"

Zorn pointed to the spiral staircase. "Both Dr. Kraft and Mr. Hare have keys," he answered, "and as for your strategic position, there it is, at the top of those stairs. Close the entrance to the laboratory, go up into the telescope-room, taking me, if you prefer, with you, and wait."

"He is right, Inspector," remarked Felix Dering, "and there is not an instant to be lost. Lend a hand, Geddes."

He grasped the moveable section of the stair, and, assisted by the Scotchman, dragged it into place, and mounted it. The constables imitated his example, bringing their prey with them. The ground floor was left untenanted, save by the throbbing gas-engine and the spick-and-span dynamoes, hurling so silently their tremendous currents into the bowels of the earth, to feed the lights in Dr. Kraft's terrible laboratory.

Felix had been correct—they were only just in time; as Mr. Brasher slipped into the dusk of the telescope-room above, a key rattled in the outer door of the tower, a murmur of voices ensued, and Kraft ambled in. With him was Otto Hare. The contrast between the two had never seemed so fantastic as now—the former tall, bland, plump, enormously large in every limb and lineament, the latter scarcely more than a midget and nervously irritable to a degree.

Kraft, the concealed watchers saw, carried a small linen-covered parcel, which he set down carefully. A chirp broke from it—the Doctor's burden was no less than his cage of tropical birds.

"Hurry up, for Heaven's sake!" cried the Golden Dwarf; "it's a fool's trick to come back at all, much more on such an errand. But since you have chosen to risk your liberty, and, possibly, your life, end the risk to mine as speedily as may be."

Joseph Kraft gained the foot of the spiral staircase (from the gloom of whose upper trap Felix Dering and Archibald Geddes looked down on his unwitting cranium), swung aside the loose section, and prepared to descend.

"I shall reappear," he announced, "in precisely the same time as it requires for Miss Esther to blink her pretty eye. And then, hey for the phæton and the Hull express. When these meddlers have sought in vain for evidence and the storm has blown over, we can return from our urgent business abroad and settle once more under our—that is to say your—vine and fig-tree. How surprised we should be to learn of an accident to the costly laboratory which you had built for me to study earth-currents in!"

(*To be concluded.*)

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Short Stories That . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a *P.W.* penknife to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, October 7th. Postcards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. has been awarded this week to Mr. John Sewell, of The Lund, Lamplugh, Cockermouth, Cumberland. whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

WIFE (club night): "Will you be home early, John?" Husband: "Ye-es, I think so. But don't keep breakfast waiting for me."

BOY: "Mrs. Smith, can yer lend me mother your wheelbarrow?" Woman: "What 'a' ye done wi' ye own?" Boy: "Faither's taken the wheel out of ours because foalk keep comming a-borrowin' it."

"FAME," said the youth with the earnest intellectual expression, "is so hard to attain! It is so difficult for one to get himself talked about!" "Humph!" rejoined the woman with cold blue eyes and a firm jaw. "You just ought to live in our neighbourhood."

SHERLOCK HOLMES: "I have not looked around, but a very tall man just came in and sat down in the opera chair behind me." Miss Marvel: "It is true! Really, you do the most wonderful things. Now, tell me how you knew without looking, of the tall man's presence." Sherlock Holmes: "His feet are sticking through under my chair."

BRIDGET, a new importation from the Emerald Isle, was very fond of reading novels, and the mistress, noticing the gas burning very late every night, took Bridget to task. "Why, I declare, ma'am," says Bridget, "I cannot read at all; but as you told me that the house was pestered with mice, shure, I lit the gas so that the cat could have a chance of catching 'em."

THEY sat on the portico of the house. "Annie, dear," he said, "do you love me?" She looked down at the tall, handsome youth, who spoke to her with such pleading in his tones. "You say you are soon to become the junior partner of the firm, George?" "Yes, my own." "And that you have £10,000 in the bank?" "Yes, darling." "And that you will inherit at least £200,000 from your mother?" "Yes, pet." "Then, George, I love you. I am yours." She fell into his outstretched arms.

*A BURGLAR was on trial for housebreaking, and conducted his own defence. "My lord," he said, addressing the judge, "you cannot possibly convict me in this charge. I will tell you why. As the evidence clearly proves, I did not break into the house at all. I found the parlour window open, as the witnesses admit, and all I did was to put in my arm and remove some unimportant articles. Now, my lord, my arm is not myself, and I fail to see how you can punish the whole individual for a fault committed by one of his limbs." "Very well," said the cautious judge, "I find your arm guilty, and sentence it to six months' imprisonment. Go with it or not as you choose." The prisoner smiled broadly, and quietly proceeded to unscrew his cork arm, leaving it in the custody of the court.

DOWNER: "I am very glad it is good form not to wear a watch with a dress suit." Upper: "Why?" Downer: "Because I never have my watch and dress suit at the same time."

GENTLEMAN (caressing a pretty little girl): "You little beauty; you shall be my wife when you are grown up—will you?" "No, I don't want to get married; but aunty there would like to!"

SARCASTIC INQUIRER: "What good will it do you to take your bicycle with you to Africa?" Prospective Soldier: "If I become homesick, sir, I can puncture one of my tyres and breathe my native air again."

"IN this sentence we read that 'Thomas strikes Henry,'" said the teacher. "Now what is the object of the word 'strike'?" "Shorter hours and higher wages," replied the future Labour Candidate at the head of the class.

SHE: "Mr. Faresplease doesn't waltz as divinely as he might, but he certainly has an easy, graceful way of putting his arm about one's waist." He: "Yes. He was a conductor on a Kensington 'bus for a long time, you know."

MR. FERGUSON was later than usual in coming home, and as his wife met him in the hallway with her usual kiss he said apologetically: "The train was crowded, Laura, and I had to ride in the smoking-carriage. I suppose I smell like a tobacco factory." "No, George," said Mrs. Ferguson, "you do not. The smell from a tobacco factory, as I remember it, is not at all offensive."

THE other day a gentleman entered a restaurant and ordered chicken. The chicken was evidently tough, for when the waiter came in he beheld the gentleman in a great state of wrath. "Waiter," he said, "this chicken is very tough." "Very sorry, sir, that chicken was a peculiar bird. Why, when we came to kill it, we couldn't catch it, so at last we had to shoot it. It flew on the housetops, and——" "Ah, by jove, that accounts for it; you must have shot the weathercock by mistake."

Two yokels, members of an obscure Lancashire village cricket team, recently challenged one another to a single-wicket match. The first man batted and scored fourteen runs. His opponent refused to take his turn until he had had his tea. Remonstrances were of no avail. The man wanted his tea and was going home to get it. "Tha con bowl at th' wickets, an' if tha hits 'em Aw'm out," he said to his opponent at last. This was agreed to, and the hungry one went to his tea. Returning leisurely forty minutes afterwards, he found the match over. "Tha's won!" said the umpire. "Nowt o' the sort!" was his reply. "But tha has. *He's bowled fifteen wides!*"

A WORTHY Yorkshire Canon, who had been greatly displeased by an act of disobedience perpetrated by one of his gardeners, sought an interview with the offender in order to reprimand him. Knowing that if he was able to avoid the interview until his master's wrath had abated, he would come off with only a few mild words of censure, the man kept out of his way. A few days afterwards, however, when the storm was quite over, master and man came face to face in one of the hothouses, and the Canon asked: "Why have you avoided me in so pointed a manner of late, Johnson?" To which the gardener replied. "Now I'll put it to you as a man, sir. Would you, if you could help it, stand in front of a cannon to be blown up?"

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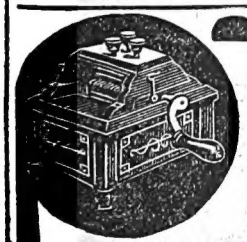

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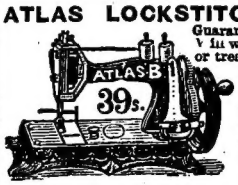

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ONE PENNY.

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

The first thing you must do on opening this week's *Short Stories* is to turn to page 432 and see if your portrait is there. If it is, lose no time in sending in your claim to us. If your claim is just, we shall certainly lose no time in sending you a crisp five-pound note. If you only knew how eager we are to give these fivers away you would be surprised. If your portrait isn't in this week, don't let that worry you. It may be in next week or the week after that. And whenever it goes in, so long as you comply with the printed conditions, that five-pound note is waiting for you.

❦

Another great attraction will appear in *Short Stories* the week after next. In that number Mr. Henry T. Johnson's new serial story will begin. It is called

"Dead to the World,"

and is about as thrilling a story as could possibly be written. It grips the attention right from the first line, and once you have started it, you will find it impossible to relinquish reading it till the end is reached.

❦

Here is a little essay, written by an esteemed lady contributor, which will probably be of interest to most of my readers.

❦

How to Make the Most of a Little Money.

Many of us may know the story of the two young girls who, on being given a quarter's allowance of dress money in advance, proceeded to spend it in different ways. The one bought everything that she fancied; the other, before buying anything, asked herself the question: "Can I do without it?"

The consequence was that the one girl spent her allowance within a very few days, while the other was a standing example to all her friends.

We may laugh at the story, but we are compelled to admit that those who wish to practise small economies, cannot do better than follow the example taught by it.

To abstain from small extravagancies is the secret of making money go a long way. Anyone who feels that she cannot resist spending more money than she ought, would do well to leave her purse at home when taking her walks abroad, or, better still, keep an exact account of every halfpenny spent. It is astonishing how foolish small extravagancies appear when they are put down in black and white, after the temptation to indulge in them is over. Do not, however, enter them as "sundries." No "sundries" are admitted as an item of well-kept household accounts. Large savings are generally made from little sums. Few people make a large purchase without due consideration, and yet many people spend as much in unconsidered trifles in the long run. It is the pennies and halfpennies that lie loose in the pocket which are not properly appreciated. "Many a mickle makes a muckle" is true of nothing more than halfpence. Little savings are mostly made in personal expenditure. What is spent in the household is generally needed, but small personal luxuries are not.

Money saved thus should not be mixed with the spending fund. Keep it apart as savings, and you will be surprised how it will grow. The Post Office Savings Bank is good for the purpose, as the little formality required to get money out acts as a check to thoughtless extravagance.

There are many ways of saving. One is to buy provisions in large quantities and take proper care that they are not wasted; another is to pay ready-money for everything.

It is false economy to give bad or insufficient food for a large family. By so doing you incur a doctor's bill. The things to save in are shams, false appearances, and self-indulgences, *not* necessaries.

❦

Advice on Love and other Matters.

(Replies to Correspondents.)

You want to know, "Ivy Leaf," whether it would be wise for you to give your lover, whom you have quarrelled with, a birthday gift, and add that you will do something desperate if you are not friends with him again soon.

By all means send him one; it is such a pity to let a quarrel drift on until a breach is made which can never be healed. Write him a nice letter, and say you hope he has forgotten all about your difference of opinion, and I am sure he will be only too glad to make it up with you. Thanks for your good wishes.

You tell me, "Harry's Darling," that you are in a dilemma, and hope that I can help you. You are engaged to a soldier in the 11th Hussars, one of the best-hearted fellows you have ever met, but your parents and friends are all against him, and say that soldiers are a reckless, worthless set, and no good to anyone. They will not consent to your marriage, and you don't wish to go against them as they have always been good to you; but you love Harry dearly, and don't know what to do in the matter.

If your parents are really so unfair as to take a dislike to your lover merely because he is a soldier, I should certainly advise you to do whatever you think right in the matter. If you are sure that he is really all that you think him, and he loves you and can keep you in comfort, I should tell your parents quietly that your mind is made up, and much as you would have liked their consent to your marriage, you feel that as they won't give in you must do without it.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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A YOUNG LADY CURED OF
INDIGESTION, DEBILITY, & HEADACHE.
ANOTHER BILE BEAN VIOTORY.

Amid pretty rural pastures about ten miles from Melton Mowbray and half the distance from Belvoir Castle is Harby Bridge, where lives Miss Lizzie Starbuck, who has recently been cured of headache, debility, and indigestion by Bile Beans for Biliousness in a remarkable manner. A *Melton Mowbray News* reporter, who inquired into the case, writes that the young lady looked such a picture of health that it was at first hard to believe the story of torture and then of triumph which was unfolded to him. "As a little child," said she, "I was never very strong. I grew too quickly; and up to quite recently endured much agony with headache and sickness. Last summer I went out cheesemaking, but had indigestion so badly that it took all the life and energy out of me. I felt as though I could not work; and although I struggled on till the end of the season, my condition grew more pitiable. Head and stomach pills I tried in vain. Still the pain of indigestion racked my whole frame. It interfered with my appetite; I slept very poorly; and I was far too weak to carry the buckets of water as I am doing now. It was something more than the ordinary 'out of sorts' or run down feeling. One day we saw an account of the wonderful properties of Bile Beans, and sent for a few. They did me good, and I then bought a large box. Before I had been taking the course long, I began to feel a marked change. The sickly feeling grew less, and there was less headache. Then these both vanished completely. Meanwhile I seemed to be pulling round in general health. Instead of being weak and low like I was before—poor in spirits, pale in looks, wasted, and fatigued by the least effort—I began to feel quite strong again. Now I am not like the same person. I feel equal to any ordinary effort, and can carry those two buckets of water (pointing to two buckets standing near) easily; and one has to be pretty strong to do that. I can honestly say that it is to Bile Beans that I owe all this. My uncle (with whom Miss Starbuck lives) did not believe in patent medicines; but I gave him some of the Beans when he was taken ill, and they did him so much good that he is now perfectly convinced as to the justice of the claims of this medicine at any rate."

"Yes," interposed the young lady's mother, "Bile Beans have done her a world of good and I can recommend them to anybody."

Mr. Starbuck also said he willingly gave Bile Beans their due, adding "They're the best things I've met with in my life!"

"Can carry two buckets of water easily."

Bile Beans for Billou ness are unequalled for indigestion, debility in all its forms, loss of appetite and energy, headache, pallid complexion, anæmia, dizziness, nervousness, chest pains, backache, palpitation, all liver and kidney disorders, constipation, piles, and "summer end fag." Bile Beans may be had of all chemists, or post free, if this paper is mentioned, from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Company, 119 and 120 London Wall, London, E.C., for price 1/1½ or 2/9 (2/9 box contains three times 1/1½). Three large boxes 7/6, or Six for 14/-.

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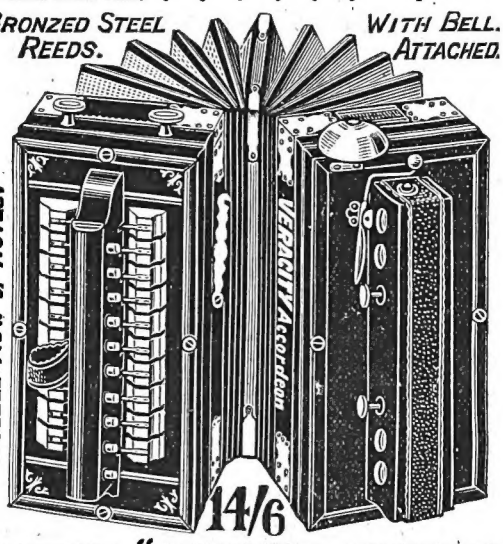

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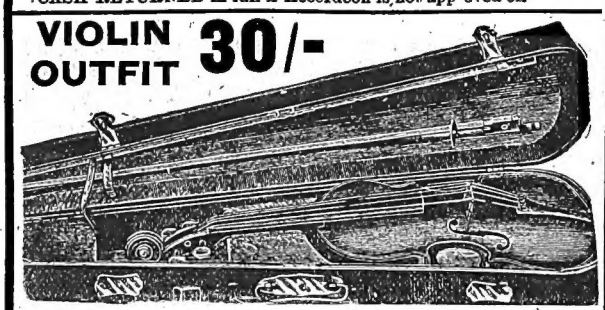

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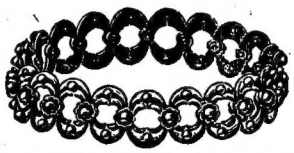

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